

The execution of digital first editorial strategy in South Africa: The case of
Netwerk24, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*

by

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Declaration

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March 2020

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The fact that I managed to complete this academic piece of writing, points to the goodness, the love, the mercy, the faithfulness and the greatness of my Creator, the only God. I could never have done this without You.

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Abstract

The influence of the adopted digital first strategy at the Afrikaans online news website Netwerk24 and its print partners, the traditional regional daily newspapers *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*, is examined and described in this study.

The theories of news routines, news selection, gatekeeping and news values are used to guide this study in answering the research questions, which centers on the flow of news articles about the alleged racism event in Schweizer-Reneke Primary School in January 2019.

The flow of news is described by analysing 53 individual articles published online and in the printed newspapers. The seven-day period in which the articles were collected, covers an alleged racism incident at the Schweizer-Reneke Primary School in 2019. This study does not focus on the event itself, however, the event is utilised to focus on the workflow at the selected publications during the covering of big news.

During 10 interviews with news workers in different roles at the four publications, light was shed on the roles of news workers, their digital first strategy, desk reporters, the importance of audience clicks and news values, the use of technology and social media, gatekeeping in this environment, repurposing of content across the publications, as well as news gathering views.

The study concludes that the publications face numerous constraints subsequent to the digital disruption – which in itself is not a novel development. However, the current state of these influential publications indicates their strategic cooperation in order to survive.

Opsomming

Die Afrikaanse aanlyn nuuswebwerf Netwerk24 en sy gedrukte vennote, die tradisionele streeksdagblaaie *Beeld*, *Die Burger* en *Volksblad*, het reeds 'n strategie om digitaal eerste nuus te lewer, in werking gestel. Die invloed van dié strategie word in hierdie studie ondersoek en beskryf.

Joernalistieke teorieë, naamlik nuusroetines, nuusseleksie, die hekwagtersrol en nuuswaardes, word ingespan om die navorsingsvrae, wat verband hou met die nuusvloei van kopie tydens die voorval van beweerde rassisme by die Laerskool Schweizer-Reneke in Januarie 2019, te beantwoord.

Om die vloei van die nuus te beskryf, is altesaam 53 artikels wat aanlyn en in gedrukte publikasies gepubliseer is, vir die studie ontleed. Al die artikels is binne sewe dae nadat die Schweizer-rasseherrie begin het, in gedrukte media gepubliseer. Hierdie studie fokus nie op die nuusgebeure self nie, maar gebruik dit om die werksvloei by die betrokke publikasies af te baken.

Die tien onderhoude wat met werknemers in verskeie rolle gevoer is, het lig gewerp op die verskeidenheid rolle van nuuswerkers, die digitaal eerste strategie, lessenaarverslaggewers, die belang van klieke en nuuswaardes, die gebruik van tegnologie en die sosiale media, die hekwagtersrol, die hergebruik van inhoud sowel as nuusinsameling.

Hierdie studie merk op dat die publikasies deur verskeie beperkings weens die digitale ontwrigting in die gesig gestaar word. Hoewel die digitale ontwrigting nie 'n nuwe ontwikkeling is nie, wys die huidige situasie van dié invloedryke publikasies op strategiese samewerking om te oorleef.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Personal motivation for this study

The digital disruption and the subsequent problems faced by young journalists at the beginning of their careers, provided the initial motivation for this study. Just how far reaching the challenges and changes in the media industry would be remains a subject of contention.

Even though the digital disruption around the world has already been explored during the last few decades by researchers from numerous angles, the news industry arguably received less attention. Academics and media professionals continue to look at each other to find solutions for the digital disruption in the media industry, amongst others in order to keep media companies profitable.

“Journalism is growing rapidly whether we like it or not; it might soon outpace the academy’s capacity to explain it all,” wrote Zelizer (1998:2) now already more than two decades ago. Whether final explanations are possible or not, describing and investigating traditional concepts in journalism studies such as the flow of news, gatekeeping and news selection in the current digital environment, should be the aim of continuous research.

Media professionals at print and online news outlets, have been faced with rapidly evolving news strategies to keep up revenue (Jordaan, 2012:12). In Media24’s integrated annual report to Shareholders of Welkom Yizani Chair Rachel Jafta and Chief executive Ishmet Davidson (2019:4) writes the company’s print media division renegotiated printing contracts which “countered the continued structural declines in print revenues with diversification projects and stringent cost management to deliver its highest profit in the past decade”. Although the revenues of News24 and Netwerk24 were slightly higher than the budget, news aggregators were closed (Jafta & Davidson, 2019:4). The combined initiatives reduced the trading loss for 24.com by more than a third year on year (Jafta & Davidson, 2019:4). This is also seen in the international trend in the news industry for news companies to lower operational costs and find new sources of income (WAN, 2018). This is embodied in cooperation between the Media24 digital platform for Afrikaans news, Netwerk24, and the daily newspapers *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*. The developing digital first strategy at these publications will be described in detail to find out how the print media is influenced, also in terms of the survival of the publications. Therefore, this researcher is reflecting upon the ideas of media professionals about their challenges and the possible solutions to it, which have not yet been thoroughly researched.

1.2 Research problem

The rise of the network society, defined here as “a form of society increasingly organising its relationships in media networks which are gradually replacing or complementing the social networks of face to face communication” (McQuail, 2010:105 citing Van Dijk) and the challenges it brings to traditional media companies not only impacts their revenue, but also the traditional distribution of information controlled by gatekeepers. As these important issues impact upon society, researchers should, and in fact are posing questions regarding ethics, fake news, as well as news selection strategies, with academic literature reflecting relevant discussions (see for example Duffy, Ling and Tandoc Jr., 2018; Lee and Tandoc Jr., 2017; Pearson and Kosicki, 2017; McQuail, 2010; Strömbäck, Karlsson, and Hopmann, 2012; Vos and Thomas, 2019).

While important questions are asked and some recommendations given, the central issue for this study is whether innovative attempts within the South African industry are often thoroughly described.

A general search of the Stellenbosch University library catalogue showed that recent academic literature about Netwerk24 has been published. A relevant article is a Nieman Report of former editor of Netwerk24, Johanna van Eeden, who wrote about establishing the news website. The unpublished PhD (Jordaan, 2018) and MA (Jordaan, 2012) dissertations by Marenet Jordaan and a MA thesis (Spies, 2018) by Mia-Ann Spies are also among the results. Spies focuses on political journalists, which differs substantially from the scope of this study. Jordaan’s PhD (Jordaan, 2018), completed in 2018, contains research findings relevant to this study. She conducted ethnographical research of the newsrooms of Netwerk24 and the publication’s use of Twitter, which sheds light on problems in the workplace. This study will, however, differ from Jordaan’s work, with the focus being on the joined forces of online and print media in the digital first strategy at the same company, Media24.

The efforts in the private media sector to ensure the future profitability of news publications constantly lead to changes and one could argue that the issue therefore requires regular research attention.

1.3 Background

The publications researched in this study have a long history in South Africa. They all belong to Media24, which is a subsidiary of the international media company Naspers. The three daily

newspapers used in this study, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*, are published from Monday to Saturday in Afrikaans and distributed in different areas of South Africa.

This study focuses on the collaboration of the three daily newspapers and Netwerk24. Historically, Netwerk24 was founded by combining the websites of the three daily newspapers in 2014. The publication celebrated its fifth birthday on 22 August 2019 and had 53 000 subscribers at the time (Loubser, 2019a). At the beginning, content for Netwerk24 was mainly sourced in the evening when the daily newspapers were sent to the printers. The articles on the website, with exceptions, appeared on the same day when the newspapers were distributed. Since then, this workflow changed, and journalists currently prioritise writing for the digital publication first (Van Eeden, 2016). Media24, including Netwerk24, now follows a digital first strategy for news. Netwerk24 can be accessed by visiting their website, www.netwerk24.com or by downloading its app. The print publications can be viewed on another app, MySubs24.

Die Burger, the companies' oldest newspaper founded in 1915 (Jordaan, 2018), traditionally distributed different editions in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape. Since 20 July 2018 the daily distribution (six times per week) of the printed edition for the Eastern Cape, *Die Burger Oos-Kaap*, was reduced to weekly, only available on Friday. The daily edition is now only available in digital format online on weekdays. The weekly printed paper on Fridays include an insert, called *Naweek*. This new venture was internationally recognised when *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* was nominated for the Global Media Awards 2019 (Netwerk24, 2019b). Editor of *Die Burger*, Willem Jordaan, explained in *Die Burger* on 14 June 2018 that the new *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* was initiated because it was not feasible any longer to distribute a newspaper with a relative low circulation in such large area six times per week (Jordaan, 2018).

Readers increasingly also find their news online and enterprises increasingly advertise their products digitally. This is a trend that impacts newspapers worldwide and only those who react timeously, continue to exist. (Jordaan, 2018, translated from Afrikaans by the researcher)

Media24 also owns other Afrikaans and English weekly newspapers and a variety of magazines. The digital versions of some of the Afrikaans publications have since also been added to Netwerk24. This initiative was also recognised when Netwerk24 was nominated for the Global Media Awards 2019 (Netwerk24, 2019b). The Afrikaans magazines are also collaborating with the website, but to a lesser extent than the three publications focussed on in this study. The content is behind a paywall and users pay R99 per month for access to Afrikaans publications ranging from multiple daily or weekly newspapers, as well as magazines.

Other insights to changes in the collaboration between the publications will be explored during interviews.

1.4 Problem statement and focus

This study will describe the collaborative flow of news for Netwerk24 and the print editions of *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* with the specific aim to investigate planned and unplanned consequences of the developing digital first strategy as it influences news selection and processing for the printed publications.

The processes and influences of this developing digital first strategy, especially on the print media at this company, where stakeholders are uncertain of the future of newspapers, has not yet been described in academic literature.

The coverage of an incident of alleged racism at the Schweizer-Reneke Primary School on 9 January 2019 will be used to focus the investigation and answer the research question, which is presented below and deals with the collaboration between Netwerk24 and the three daily newspapers in the context of their digital first strategy. A photograph portraying a grade R classroom on the first school day showed black and white learners sitting at tables on different sides of their classroom (Marx, 2019). The photograph a teacher took for parents made its way to social media which caused a racism storm in South African and international media (Al Jazeera, 2019). It was argued in turn by the school that the children were separated because of “language barriers, and not race” (Marx, 2019). The school, workers unions, department of education and political parties became involved as the events unfolded on the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa (Van der Walt 2019a; Van der Walt, 2019b; Hanke, 2019; Cilliers, 2019a; Cilliers, 2019b). Whatever the case, the event was controversial and polarising to the extent that is said to have influenced the national elections in May 2019 (Marx, 2019).

The coverage on the event in various media outlets was named by the media as the Schweizer-event. The same name will be used in this study.

1.5 Theoretical points of departure and research focus

1.5.1 Theoretical points of departure

The theories of news values and news flow, including gatekeeping and news selection, form the basis of this study.

The study of news values is relevant as it offers a description of decisions in the newsroom. To define news seems nearly impossible (Fourie, 2008:234), but the theory of news

values has developed to investigate the phenomenon. News can be described as information about recent significant events and researchers have identified many news values during the last decades in journalism studies (Croteau, Hoynes & Milan, 2011:125). The news values attributed to an event influence whether it will be selected, produced and published as news. News values try to predict the “extent [to which] the public will read” an article (Conley & Lambie, 2009:82). In the media landscape changes along with social, economic and cultural trends, will lead to a re-evaluation of the theory of news values (Conley & Lambie, 2009:98,100).

Various studies attempt to compile lists of news values. A list by Fourie (2008:397) includes actuality, relevance, impact, conflict and prominence with hard news, whereas human interest is associated with soft news. The question must be asked however, which criteria are still relevant in online digital newsrooms? According to McQuail (2010:564):

News values are the criteria applied by journalists and editors in news organisations to determine whether or not to carry particular items of news. In commercial media the consensus value is whether or not the item concerned is likely to interest a potential audience. However, there are other sources of value, including a judgment of intrinsic significance or the pull or pressure of influential interests other than the audience.

The “standard news-value criteria” indicated by Conley and Lambie (2009:83) differ slightly from the two other lists of news values cited by Fourie (2008: 234). The list compiled by Harriss, Leiter and Johnson show yet other news values: conflict, progress, disaster, consequence, prominence and novelty (Fourie, 2008:234). Galtung and Ruge compiled a list of news values in 1965 which they warned “hypothesises rather than demonstrates the presence of these factors” and was answering the question “how do events become news?” (O’Neill & Harcup, 2009:164). This list was explained not to be complete, write O’Neill and Harcup (2009:165). Galtung and Ruge’s seminal list is: the time span of an article, intensity or threshold value, clarity, cultural proximity or relevance, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition and socio-cultural values of the society and gatekeepers (Fourie, 2008:235).

In order to describe the digital first strategy at Netwerk24, the theory of news values will be used to examine their use by editors instead of relying on the number of audience click’s articles receive on Netwerk24.

Gatekeeping as a theory describes “how news flows along certain channels which contain gates where decisions are made that influence the way the news is perceived, reconstructed and eventually packaged” (White cited by Fourie, 2008:237). In this study gatekeeping will shed light on the decisions made in newsrooms and will therefore be used to describe the digital first strategy for the newsrooms at Netwerk24.

According to the gatekeeping theory the flow of news is controlled by gatekeepers who select information allowed into the (sometimes distorting) process of narrowing information to a manageable number of news stories (Shoemaker, Vos & Reese, 2009:74,76). Scholars researching gatekeeping mostly use content analysis as methodology (Shoemaker *et al.*, 2009:81), as this study aims to do.

Various role players in the newsroom are gatekeepers, but traditionally the news editor plays the largest part (Conley & Lamble, 2009:217). A newsroom may still aim to provide a service to the community, but the place and role of gatekeepers have changed in the internet age (Conley & Lamble, 2009:217). The actual process of selection is not only made once daily by editors at the newspapers, but multiple times daily by dedicated editors who are continually deciding on the placement of news stories on the homepage as events develop (Croteau *et al.*, 2011:130). “Journalists now routinely produce content suitable for their newspaper’s print edition as well as for the added video, audio, and interactive features of the paper’s website”, write Croteau *et al.* (2011:13).

Barker and Jane (2017:485) refer to a gatekeeping crisis where media users “rely on others to select and manage it [information] for us”. Groups of people from different segments of societies can interact with content published online. However, studies show the opposite might be happening in a phenomenon called “internet autism” which refers to people who are “‘perversely’ retreating further and further into their own little worlds away from challenging or conflicting ideas” (Barker & Jane, 2017:490).

At printed newspapers and at online news publications gatekeepers have an important role in the digital era as media users cannot consume all the available content online (Fourie, 2008:76). Gatekeepers attach importance to selected articles in a newspaper in the way they are presented, both in printed copy and online (Fourie, 2008:76). External gatekeepers, such as government and policy makers, as well as internal gatekeepers, for example the cost of production, influence the final selection of news consumers see (Fourie, 2008:76). According to Fourie (2008:237) the following are all gates in news flow:

The source of the news, the abilities of the news people, the news policy of the medium, different influences on the news medium, such as legal constraints and

financial impediments, the mere fact that a specific news item has to make way for other news items considered to be of higher news value, and eventually, how news is perceived by news people and news audiences.

The newspaper editor selects the articles for the front pages of a newspaper which is seen as the “editor’s selection of the most important events of the day” (Croteau *et al.*, 2011:128). This selection is influenced by news values such as the “timeliness of a story, its impact on the community of readers, the geographic or social proximity of the event, and the prominence of its participants” (Croteau *et al.*, 2011:129). Editors construct this selection knowing they have obligations to multiple constituencies.

As a result, front-page gatekeeping is about more than just the criteria of what is considered newsworthy; it is actively constructed each day by what editors say in the routine (but not predetermined) editorial conference. (Croteau *et al.*, 2011:130)

Gatekeeping as a theory is criticised because it implies one primary gate, has a simplistic view of how news originates and suggests individual selection (McQuail, 2010:309). McQuail (2010:309) argues that the social context of the news values and gatekeeping is important.

The workplace of journalists motivates them to “conform to the policy and culture of the organisation that employs them” and their “desire for promotion and their need to protect their jobs and avoid conflict” influence news flow inside an organisation (Fourie, 2008:81).

Recent developments regarding news selection include the practice referred to as way-finding (Pearson and Kosicki, 2017:1088), which entails researching the path a user takes when navigating the internet while furthermore, the ever increasing volume of news and massive subsequent news flow that newsrooms need to contend with, obligated the development of a process of gate checking (Schwalbe, Silcock & Candela, 2015:478).

The competition between printed media and on-line news distribution motivates changes as to the role of journalists, with the associated changes regarding skills required. The fundamental matter of maintaining revenue within the news printing industry also needs to be reviewed, while simultaneously addressing the different approaches required in order to cope with an increasing public demand for an online product. The important role played by audiences ranges from gaining access to the advertisers, and their needs and preferences for reliable content, to their swift and ever increasing feedback options.

1.5.2 Research goals and question

Flowing from the discussion above the following research goals are formulated:

- 1: to describe the flow of online news articles at Netwerk24 referring to the theories of gatekeeping and news values in the example of the Schweizer-event;
- 2: to describe the flow and selection process of articles about the Schweizer-event in *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*.

These goals are informed by the following general research question: What is the nature of the collaboration between Netwerk24 and the three daily newspapers in the context of the digital first strategy at Media24?

1.6 Research design and methodology

This study relies on a qualitative content analysis and qualitative interviews. Interviews will be conducted with editors and other senior role players at the relevant publications to describe the flow of news. A qualitative content analysis of articles published online by Netwerk24 and in the printed editions for seven days will be done to ensure triangulation, which is a method to validate qualitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:275, citing Denzin).

Printed versions of *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* will be used to see how these newspapers reported on the case of alleged racism at the Schweizer-Reneke Primary School. The online content about the event on Netwerk24 will also be collected. Various media professionals at each of the four publications will be interviewed to describe the production process at their publication. Also included are people who worked on the story while it was breaking and told on Netwerk24. They were the social media team, bloggers, journalists, photographers, videographers, sub-editors and news editors working to get information published in this fast-paced environment.

The interviews will as far as possible be conducted in person in Bloemfontein, and via the internet with respondents in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The interviews will be recorded on an iPhone 6s that is secured with a pass code and fingerprints.

The articles online will be compared to the printed articles. This researcher will endeavour to gain insight into the relevant news values, news selection and news flows, including the various gatekeeping processes.

1.7 Chapter layout

The chapter layout is as follows:

Chapter 2 contains the literature review.

Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework.

Chapter 4 describes the research design and methodology.

Chapter 5 presents the research findings.

Chapter 6 concludes the study.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Most of the challenges faced by the South African publications of Media24 in this study are difficulties experienced in other countries as well. The disruption of the century old business model of the industry by information and communications technology (ICTs) impacts virtually every aspect of journalism. From the literature reviewed various themes, emerged: changes in the newsroom, revenue demands, the audience's new role, website analytics and other technologies. These themes will be addressed below as they relate to concerns about the traditional roles of the media, especially the watchdog role within South Africa as a young democracy, the independence of the media and the quality of journalism.

2.2 Changing newsrooms

Newsrooms globally are adapting to the demands made by news owners, shareholders, audiences and other role players. Journalists are immensely pressured by job losses across the industry with the resultant increased workload on the remaining staff members.

Researching the working conditions of American digital journalists, Cohen (2018:16) found the pressures in digital-first newsrooms have led journalists to form unions. A Canadian study found journalists who lost their jobs mostly moved from “full-time, secure positions to part-time, contract and freelance work in the industry, which is lower paid and insecure” (Cohen, Hunter & O'Donnell, 2019:13). The study revealed the loss of an income is not the only thing journalists lose, they are then also “unable to contribute to what they view as an important social good or vital public service” (Cohen *et al.*, 2019:15). Thus individual journalists experience increased anxiety levels regarding employment security and their role perceptions.

The job insecurity and newsroom cuts add up to a vicious cycle. Ekdale, Tully, Harmsen, and Singer (2015:383) researched the relationship between job insecurity and how employees adapt to changes in the newsroom. “Layoffs, buyouts, and closings have become increasingly common, a development that affects both those who lose their jobs and those who remain in the newsroom,” write Ekdale *et al.* (2015:383). The study found “that a culture of job insecurity has a limiting effect on newsroom change” (Ekdale *et al.*, 2015:838). Employees who feared they would lose their jobs, did not want to “risk altering well-understood practices”, while others “would rather accommodate than initiate change”. The answers of respondents in

their study changed according to whether the news workers think “their jobs are at risk”, think “the news products have declined in quality” or think “company management can be trusted to make wise and just decisions” (Ekdale *et al.*, 2015:895). The responses of hopeful, obliging, fearful and cynical news workers helped “explain whether news workers are likely to experiment, conform, withdraw or challenge their employer’s efforts to change news practices” (Ekdale *et al.*, 2015:895). This finding is important to newsrooms who want to be innovative because the feelings of employees would partially determine success. Boyles (2016:242) concluded that innovative ideas in news media can easily end up isolated from the newsroom.

To improve revenue, newsrooms not only face job losses, but are also streamlined to improve productivity – which changes the roles of journalists. “The technical and economic changes are disrupting the established professional status, roles, and practices of journalists, removing professional control that previously existed,” state Witschge and Nygren (2009:37). Journalists traditionally controlled a large amount of knowledge available to audiences, but it “has crumpled with the internet” (Witschge & Nygren, 2009:55). The role of journalists is not clear anymore as journalists took over “technical production” (Witschge & Nygren, 2009:55).

How the roles of journalists and editors at the organisational level in newsrooms are affected by social media were explored in a study by Wu (2018:777). Conventionally, reporters “are oriented towards their news sources” while editors are oriented “towards the ultimate audience” (Wu, 2018:778). Wu (2018:778) found “the relationship between reporters and editors are changing”. Social media is disrupting “traditional journalistic roles, news production, promotion and dissemination processes”, because reporters and editors use social media for different reasons (Wu, 2018:778). “Reporters used social media to find sources, share content and build community, editors added hyperlinks, monitored and followed up comments” says Wu (2018:778). He continues: “Editors embraced Facebook. However, reporters favoured Twitter” (Wu, 2018:790).

With the uncertainty of their role in society and in the newsroom, journalists need more and different skills. Ferrucci, Russell, Choi, Duffy and Thorson (2017:259) explored the merging of a radio and a newspaper newsroom in the American city St. Louis in Missouri. According to the editor, the merge was because journalism was “heading toward hybrid or converged models of journalism” (Ferrucci *et al.*, 2017:259). They found the journalists continued to view themselves as a print or radio journalist, merely contributing to the other platform (Ferrucci *et al.* 2017:261). Mostly, only new employees viewed themselves as multimedia journalists (Ferrucci *et al.* 2017:260).

Another study, looking into the implementation of a new workflow at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), points “to a polarisation where some journalists experience a

deskilling and a decrease in autonomy, while others experience an increase in autonomy as part of a process of reskilling and multiskilling” (Bro, Hansen & Andersson, 2016:1005). According to the study, the new workflow “significantly improved the utilisation of resources”, but journalists’ “perception of themselves as journalists” was influenced (Bro *et al.*, 2016:1011). Many news workers were less satisfied in their jobs and rather felt “being more like factory workers at an assembly line than journalists” (Bro *et al.*, 2016:1013). The idea of “what a news reporter is and should do” was re-defined and the study concluded correspondents and presenters were more “visible and audible to the readers, listeners and viewers than ever”, but others lost their bylines (Bro *et al.*, 2016:1015-1016). The new workflow challenge what is new, what is news and “what a news reporter does and what a news reporter is altogether” (Bro *et al.*, 2016:1016).

A British study suggests journalists are bound to be at their desks more often than they are away gathering information. Lewis, Williams and Franklin (2008:1) write more work and not more people in newsrooms “have prompted desk-bound journalists to develop an increasing reliance on pre-packaged sources of news deriving from the PR industry and news agencies”. This study also found “substantial empirical evidence” to believe posed questions about quality and independence are justifiable as journalists are under pressure to produce more content without more journalists (Lewis *et al.*, 2008:1). This researcher will therefore include questions in interviews with the editor of Netwerk24 as well as a news editor at Netwerk24, about the so-called desk reporters at the publications.

Whether more time in offices are better for teamwork in newsrooms, remains an open question. A decade ago, scholars predicted teamwork was to become more important in the digital age (Steyn & Steyn, 2009:47 cite Peter Drucker). Steyn and Steyn (2009:62) then concluded that newsroom staff in mainstream media in South Africa in 2009 was not competent team workers. The study predicted “improved teamwork skills among first-line newsroom managers in South Africa are likely to improve team effectiveness and efficiency, and in the process improve professional output by the South African media” (Steyn & Steyn, 2009:62). How teams fit into the workflow and collaboration between Netwerk24 and the newspapers will be addressed in interview questions.

2.3 Budgets and revenue in journalism

Pressure for larger profits “compromises the independence of the press”, but Lewis *et al.* (2008:18) found it would be unfair to blame journalists for this because they cannot change

budgets. Corporate restructuring brings uncertainty that has implications for society at large (Cohen, Hunter & O'Donnel, 2019:1).

Franklin (2014:267) writes that news media around the world use a “diversity of business models and revenue streams”. Ngomba (2017:257) shares the idea and explains many (online) news platforms in Africa “are struggling to find profitable and sustainable online business models” and many survive with foreign donations.

Hofstetter and Schoenhagen (2017:56) found commercial imperatives should not have too much weight, as it can strongly limit the creative potential of cross-media production with possibly a resultant loss in quality. They argue that “this may lead to further financial losses, which in turn causes further staff cuts, and so on. Hence, more research and discussion should be invested in how this vicious circle may be broken” (2017:56).

Therefore, according to Wu (2018:788), entrepreneurialism is becoming “a core element” in the identity of journalists. Franklin (2014:256) poses a link between how newsrooms are experimenting with the price of newspapers, and how different paywalls are tested. Chyi and Tenenboim (2019:14) warn that the higher pricing on printed newspapers may serve to lessen the dependence on advertisers, but might in the long run become too expensive to loyal readers. When the number of loyal readers decline, the paper will again be less appealing to advertisers (Chyi & Tenenboim, 2019:14).

News companies continue to survive and make profits by cutting costs, not by earning a higher income. According to McChesney:

After a good decade of experimentation, it is clear that as traditional journalism disintegrates, no models for making Web journalism – even bad journalism – profitable at anywhere near the level necessary for a credible popular news media have been developed, and there is no reason to expect any in the visible future. (McChesney, 2012:686)

A recent study by Cawley (2018:2) found, after analysing corporate annual reports in Britain, that newspaper publishers are (still) finding it difficult “extracting a profit from news content”. Their sample was three leading legacy newspaper publishers in the United Kingdom (UK), namely Guardian Media Group, Daily Mail and General Trust and Trinity Mirror across 15 financial years from 2002. Possibilities to publish online “has eroded the distribution barriers that shielded the commodity value and commercial sustainability of print news production in older models of mass communication” (Cawley, 2018:2). Cawley’s study focus on 15 years from 2002 until 2016 when they “began tying their corporate features to digital”. These

publishers had to reassure shareholders “about the growth potential of digital activities” whilst print assets declined (Cawley, 2018:2). Cawley (2018:4) sums up that fewer journalists are not only a problem for readers, but also to non-subscribers, because “democratic societies require public interest journalism even if the market can no longer sustain its production”. Cawley (2018:4) cites Soloski who claims publishers who had to cut costs “prioritised near-term bottom line objectives above the quality of journalism or longer-term issues of sustainability”. Cawley (2018:4) cites Krumsvik who writes “cost-cutting and editorial redundancies became the standard industry response to withered revenues, while print product innovation focused on processes for efficiency improvements”. Cawley’s study concludes that the market for news outlets consistently fails to support public interest journalism and the profit of companies is only achieved by significant cost-cutting (2018:19). Another conclusion suggested by Cawley (2018:19) concerns the indication that “new digital players would displace” traditional news media’s role in “securing transparency and accountability in democratic societies”. He found it might not be true, because even after decades of cost-cutting and retrenchments “legacy newspaper publishers have remained the UK’s lynchpin of journalistic employment, investment and original news output” (Cawley 2018:19, cites Levy and Nielsen). The fact that legacy media still employs the most journalists underlines why investigating the decline of the print industry and the rise of their digital platforms is still relevant and important. The daily newspapers researched in this study can be viewed as legacy media and two of the publications are over a century old.

Goyette-Côté, Carbasse and George (2012:753) argue that the industry expected the internet to develop more diverse media ownership globally. However, “it seems not to have fostered as many new sources [of news], so much as new gateways to access the same content produced by a few companies” (Goyette-Côté *et al.*, 2012:753). The study supposes the concentration of ownership, less journalists and decrease in pluralism in Canada and Québec are also seen elsewhere (Goyette-Côté *et al.*, 2012:753). Their study described how at first newspapers had websites repurposing their content, and how in 2012 it was difficult to say if the website or printed newspaper was repurposing content as both mediums gave access to the same content (Goyette-Côté *et al.*, 2012:760). A 2014 study revealed that Swedish readers were also informed by the same news content, whether they were reading reporting online or in print (Ghersetti, 2014:373). A content analysis of the 2010 elections in that country showed that none of the local newspapers reported significantly different online or in print, contrasting from the perceived idea that different news platforms should complement each other (Ghersetti, 2014:383). The finding that similar reporting occurred on both platforms will be investigated in this study. The collaboration between the publications and their focus on their digital first

strategy will be explored.

2.4 Audience

Historically, the independence of the American newsroom has been sacred since tension between owners of news media generating advertising revenue and the editorial newsroom became a crisis during the period 1900 to 1920 (McChesney, 2012:683). The solution then was that “professionals will determine and produce news” (McChesney, 2012:683). By 1920 the major journalism schools in America were established and by 1923 the American Society of Newspaper Editors was established, which formed a professional code to follow (McChesney, 2012:683). However, during the drastic changes in the news media market in recent years “traditional logic and rhythm of daily newspapers lost ground” (García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner & Meier, 2014:582). The involvement of audiences is of much importance (García-Avilés *et al.*, 2014:583). How Netwerk24, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* balances their independence and being influenced for example by the clicks an article receives online, will be addressed in this study.

The audience can more easily voice their opinion about news in the digital era and therefore plays a larger role in news selection than before. The “close correspondence between clicks and audience interests” is often accepted, but Kormelink and Meijer (2018:669) studied the motivation of audience members to click or not. They problematise the relationship between clicks and audience interests and found “30 considerations for clicking or not clicking” (Kormelink & Meijer, 2018:669, 680). These considerations were categorised as cognitive (mental), affective (emotional) or pragmatic (practical) (Kormelink & Meijer, 2018:680). The study found that “clicks tell only part of the story” and “even if one seeks a rough estimate of people’s news interests, clicks are a flawed instrument” (Kormelink & Meijer, 2018:680).

By giving people what they supposedly ‘want’ – as captured in clicks – news organisations could end up harming not only democracy, but also themselves, as adhering to clicks might lead to the trivialisation of news and thus to a decreasing interest of users. (Kormelink & Meijer, 2018:680)

Another study on reader’s comments also revealed newsrooms should rethink before relying too much on audience influence. Lee and Tandoc Jr. (2017:445) concluded readers’ comments often try to prove news articles wrong, because readers “are more likely to leave comments on

the news stories with whom they disagree” (Chung, Munno & Moritz cited by Lee & Tandoc Jr., 2017:445). This “lead people to evaluate the news as less accurate, reliable, and trustworthy, [while] repeated exposure to negative audience feedback may cultivate media scepticism over time” (Lee & Tandoc Jr., 2017:445). The researchers found the opposite too, that favourable audience feedback “may make fake news more believable” (Lee & Tandoc Jr., 2017:445).

Nelson (2018:540) argues the news industry is highlighting the measures of audience size results more and more. “Journalists [are] pursuing larger audiences, which then perpetuates the profession’s focus on basic traffic metrics” writes Nelson (2018:540).

Some researchers argue that the use of audience feedback in the form of clicks and comments is not viewed as all negative. Audience metrics is important to the news production process and is often used to “determine news story selection and placement” (Nelson & Tandoc Jr., 2018:1). Nelson and Tandoc Jr. (2018:1) studied two time periods, in 2013 and in 2016, to observe how digital editors determined the placement of stories, how meetings determine the role of online metrics and if this changed over years. The researchers found journalists changed to deal more directly “with their seemingly competing desires to attract large audiences and produce watchdog journalism” (Nelson & Tandoc Jr., 2018:2). The study concludes that changes occurred in the online newsroom with regards to the sorting of news stories as either attracting clicks or those that “shine a light, serve as a watchdog, win an award or impact public policy” (Nelson & Tandoc Jr., 2018:2,9). Most digital editors used online metrics to get the “largest number of clicks for each story the paper published” (Nelson & Tandoc Jr., 2018:8). These researchers found indications of “internal uncertainty within the newsroom about whether or not reaching a large audience and publishing public service journalism are incompatible goals” (Nelson & Tandoc Jr., 2018:9).

Nearly a decade ago a study by Peters (2012:703) found that the journalism profession should “redefine itself and adapt to the changing needs of the citizen” to “uphold journalism and its function for democracy”. He furthermore argues (2012:704) “to improve our awareness, attention, and understanding of what the experiences of journalism will be in the future, we must certainly begin to speak with audiences, as opposed to just about them”. This researcher will enquire through interviews with decision makers at the researched publications about the extent to which the audience influences news production.

To include the audience might be more important than journalists initially thought, as a recent study by Willnat, Weaver and Wilhoit (2019:423) found that what the audience think about journalism and what journalists think about journalism is not the same. Even though this was found in an American study published in 2019, using data collected in America during

2013 and 2014 (Willnat, *et al.*, 2019:423), it should also motivate South African news media practitioners to ponder their relevance locally. The study showed that the public view neutral stories as more important than journalists, and that journalists indicated they view the interpretation of news as more important than the readers does (Willnat *et al.*, 2019:437). Some findings also indicated that the American public are “clamoring for more neutral journalism” (Willnat *et al.*, 2019:437). Findings further shows a “negative relationship between education and perceived media performance” and suggests

journalists have to do a better job explaining their work to an educated audience that might have become sceptical of traditional journalism. Journalists need to redouble their efforts to be transparent about reporting practices, making sure they are clear about when and how they are evaluating evidence to reach an interpretive conclusion. (Willnat *et al.*, 2019:437)

A study on slow journalism highlights the importance of high-quality journalism in the survival of news publications. Dowling (2016:531) researched slow journalism in the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, and in America by examining four publications, actively deciding to choose quality articles over speedy ones. The case studies show approaches to fund slow journalism and the apparent greater emphasis placed on the quality of this form of journalism (Dowling, 2016:541). The research investigates “experimental alternatives to mainstream media’s reliance on traditional advertising as the main source for revenue” (Dowling, 2016:531). Dowling (2016:543) found those in charge of slow journalism abandon “capitalist methods associated with large corporate media” and that this gave way to a “distinct advantage in the race for the tablet market and the recovery of print audiences through immersive longform journalism”. According to Robert Boynton, cited by Dowling (2016:531), slow journalism’s readers are especially the “educated affluent audiences” that advertisers are seeking.

The measure of consumption of news is attributed to two factors. One, a drop in the time spent by a person on news is also influenced by the larger variety of media outlets people can choose from in the digital era (Thurman & Fletcher, 2019:555). The second reason people spend less time consuming news, points to the “differences in the way news is consumed in print and online” (Thurman & Fletcher, 2019:556). They conclude that online users might consume snippets of news which reduces the time an online reader spends on the online newspaper versus the printed edition.

Keeping advertising revenue up and finding an online business model currently still proves to be difficult. Krumsvik (2012:738) predicted years ago traditional journalism would

fund new ventures in the industry – which seems to have been correct at Netwerk24 and the daily newspapers *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*. This assumption will be tested in this study. A Norwegian study by Krumsvik found

the conditions for profitability in new digital media make them unable to provide future funding for journalism organisations as we know them. However, digital media products will increase their strategic value in order to defend and expand the reach of traditional media players. (Krumsvik, 2012:738)

Moyo, Mare and Matsilele (2019:1) argue African newsrooms are uneasy about “newsroom metrics and engagement rates at the expense of the broader public interest”. These metrics are used to grow audiences, increase engagement and improve newsroom workflows (Moyo *et al.*, 2019:1). Moyo *et al.* (2019:15) argue twisted public interest commenced from the “desire to narrow the gap between journalistic output and audience preferences”. This is seen in the ongoing changes to online content to “attract more eyeballs, clicks, web views, and shares”. Moyo *et al.* (2019:15) argue news consumers are led to be misinformed about the content of stories – and it is called fake news and clickbaiting. However, the study by Moyo *et al.* (2019:15) does not suggest analytic tools lead to “the turning over judgments of newsworthiness” but the researchers have shown “editorial metrics are influencing the distribution and packaging of news content in order to meet the needs and expectations of the audience”.

2.5 Analytics

Analytics provide valuable information about audiences to websites – including new news ventures. Duffy *et al.* (2018:1142) cite Rauch who writes analytics were previously used for market research “which goes against the journalistic ideal of independence”. This might explain why journalists seems to be reluctant to admit the influence of analytics on news. A study by Duffy *et al.* (2018:1130) “examine[s] why newsrooms accept the voice of the people in some circumstances but resist in others”. The study concludes “it would be naïve to expect continued independence which, truthfully, may always have been a normative ideal rather than an empirical reality” (Duffy *et al.*, 2018:1144). The researchers write newsrooms differentiates between internalising analytics which was accepted; and subjective reader comments that is ignored (Duffy *et al.*, 2018:1142).

Newsworkers used Web analytics to see what stories were being read but not to direct what to write next — that was still their own prerogative. Analytics did help them choose which stories to elevate on their newsfeed, however, and to show how well individual reporters were doing. In other words, our interviewees suggested that they were going about the task of internalising analytics and fitting them into journalistic practice, expanding the field. Reader comments, however, were still more often treated with disdain than they were internalised into everyday newsroom doxa [common belief or popular opinion]. (Duffy *et al.*, 2018:1142)

In 2014 Kormelink and Meijer studied technology giving online audiences in the Netherlands the power to choose what to read and see, by customizing their news feed on news websites. Editors told the researchers in interviews that the demand for personalisation is “low because readers’ interests are probably not as narrow as we imagine they are” (Kormelink & Meijer, 2014:633). The study concludes that users wish to have control: “to be able to consult all content whenever and wherever they want it, and to be able to choose anything without having to choose anything” (Kormelink & Meijer, 2014:639). They want to see the “most important and most current news at first glance” (Kormelink & Meijer, 2014:639). This desire might be good news for journalists who fear they may be replaced by robots.

2.6 Technologies

Linden (2017:125, 135) studied so called “robot journalism” that is used in narrow categories for example “structured sets of data from sports, real estate and stock markets as input to create news items as output”. According to the study *The New York Times* is exploring predictive analytics to better understand users, “while editorial decisions are still regarded as a human exercise (Linden, 2017:135). Learning algorithms might help computers to learn to output news, as texts are generated from unstructured PDFs for tax authorities, administrative courts and the National Board for Consumer Disputes faster and with fewer mistakes than humans (Linden, 2017:135,130). The study concludes journalism, as a creative job, has a lower risk to be automated (Linden, 2017:136).

Social media, text messaging and the internet continue to change newsrooms. A study on the use of WhatsApp in Chilean newsrooms (Dodds, 2019:17) suggests soon “virtual relationships” might be “privileged over face-to-face interactions”. Dodds (2019:16) writes the

application “offers the possibility to access faster and bigger amounts of information but is also changing the way some journalists engage in the process of newsmaking and with their sources”. Dodds (2019:16) warns that “technologies. . . might be de-skilling older journalists and preventing newer generations from learning face-to-face tactics to gather information”. Other negative sentiments about the use of WhatsApp include the informality of the relationship between the journalists and sources (Dodds, 2019:16).

Journalists are confronted regularly with information that sways between being off and on the record. The virtual relationships in which journalists entangle themselves need to be addressed in order to prevent ethical lapses and lead to practices most closely related to the deontology [nature] of the profession. (Dodds, 2019:15)

These news technologies also require more skills, as explored in 2.2 above.

A study “shows that making an information visualisation is a difficult and complex process which requires many different disciplines to cooperate and come together (Smit, De Haan & Buijs, 2014:352). Designing visual information for the new platforms and technologies used, differs from designers delivering to clients. This poses challenges, including the pressure for timeliness in newsrooms, the journalists instead of the client initiating the designs, and the designer not knowing the consumer very well (Smit *et al.*, 2014:352).

Interview questions in this study will include how and which technology and social media are used in the workflow and operations of the publications.

2.7 Gaps in the field of research

This researcher was unable to find any South African study that describes the complete workflow of publications sharing newsrooms across digital and printed platforms. Although Media24 counts as one of the large media companies in South Africa, it is comparably small to the English language market, locally and abroad. The relatively small number of employees of whom are expected much by both shareholders and audiences is therefore the focus of this study.

2.8 Summary

This chapter discussed the pressures and responsibilities entrusted to newsrooms employees while the industry is meanwhile suffering large revenue losses. News professionals experience a tension between maintaining their independence in choosing news versus being guided by the engaging audience. The interesting new possibilities posed by technology were briefly mentioned, as well as reference made regarding the challenges they present to journalists.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

As the aim of this study is to describe the flow of news and news selection processes at the selected digital and printed publications, Chapter 3 will address the theoretical aspects of news routines, news selection, gatekeeping as well as news values.

The theories of news values and gatekeeping describe important functions of news media (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2012:718). Both theories describe “complex communication process[es]” as demonstrated in the seminal news value study by Galtung and Ruge in 1965 and in the seminal gatekeeper study by White in 1950 (Bro & Wallberg, 2014:447), which were introduced in Chapter 1 and will be elaborated on here.

3.2 News routines

News routines are established to let newsrooms function to their best capacity. It is best described in Becker and Vlad (2009:61) citing Shoemaker and Reese: “The job of these routines is to deliver, within time and space limitations, the most acceptable product to the consumer in the most efficient manner”. Tuchman (cited by Becker and Vlad, 2009:61) suggests in news routines workers “try to control the flow of work and the amount of work to be done”.

Since social media and the internet is widely used, it changed news processes (Barker & Jane, 2017:412). Social media is even viewed as a competitor to traditional news mediums, such as television and newspapers, that experience rapid revenue decline which in turn changes the way newsrooms operate (Barker & Jane, 2017:412). Descriptions of news routines, including closely related theories such as news selection, gatekeeping and news values, are therefore also changing.

Tuchman (cited by Becker & Vlad, 2009:61) suggests that news should rather be categorised by how it happens and the requirements it poses to the organisation rather than “the category scheme of journalists”. She argues that stories should be grouped as scheduled or unscheduled, if it is urgent or not, how technology affects the news, and if decisions about the event can be made in advance, because it provides a better description of the functioning of the newsroom (Becker & Vlad, 2009:61).

The idea that news production routines can be described and identified contributed to the argument that “news should be viewed as constructed social reality rather than a mirror image of events that have taken place” (Becker & Vlad, 2009:59).

The personal needs of journalists, such as promotions and job security, also influences news routines and in the end, content. Other influences on the content of the media is the norms and standards of the newsroom, and its deadlines (Fourie, 2008:82).

The studies discussed in this section, points to aspects of these processes this researcher will keep in mind when analysing the content and interviewing participants. As an example, this researcher will seek answers from news editors regarding the different workflow patterns for scheduled or unscheduled news, according to the suggestion by Tuchman discussed above. In this way the news construction processes at the publications will be more accurately described.

3.3 News selection

The selection process is influenced by news values, which will be dealt with in depth later in this chapter (see 3.5). “Media representations reduce, shrink, condense, and select/repeat aspects of intricate social relations in order to represent them as fixed, natural, obvious and ready to consume”, write O’Neill and Harcup (2009:163, citing Nkosi Ndela).

News media do not have enough space on pages to publish stories on all the hints and ideas for stories a newsroom receives and therefore a selection process is necessary (Fourie, 2008:76). Print newsroom workers decide how much space on pages are dedicated to a certain news story and thereby create “a hierarchy of news and news importance” (Fourie, 2008:76). “The media do not merely reproduce news, but that they evaluate it and actively create or produce the news reality”, says Fourie (2008:76).

The theory of news selection is particularly relevant to this study as websites have a much larger capacity to publish news stories than printed publications, which is seen in the content analysis in 5.2. How this factor, and the difference in the distribution areas between the four selected publications in this study, interact, will contribute in the study to explain and describe selection process and help to answer the research goals and question presented in Chapter 1.

3.4 Gatekeeping

According to Fourie (2008:237) gatekeeping and news flow should be viewed together as the “gatekeepers are responsible for the flow of news from its sources to the eventual audiences”.

The gatekeepers “are the people or groups within a media organisation that ultimately decide what is going to appear and how it is going to appear in the media” (Fourie, 2008:76), as discussed in 1.5.1.

McQuail (2010:308) explains gatekeeping can be applied wider than only newsrooms as it “applies to decisions about distribution and marketing of existing media products. In a wider sense it refers to the power to give or withhold access to different voices in society and is often a locus of conflict”.

In the 1950’s when the audience was viewed by academic researchers as passive and waiting for “manufactured” news content, the gatekeeping theory became influential (Fourie, 2008:237). David Manning White’s seminal gatekeeping work in 1950 at first focused on the editor, whom he called Mr Gates, receiving telegraphs and discarding some of them. Then, in 1965 Galtung and Ruge proposed a selective selection model, including their seminal work on news values. Their theory further showed the importance of White’s study by indicating that news does not flow straight to the reader (Fourie, 2008:237). The theory has since evolved, and apart from Mr Gates and some other gates identified by White, now also includes many more role players, such as the news medium, the abilities of the news workers and the source of the news (Fourie, 2008:237).

Gatekeepers attach importance to selected articles in a newspaper in the way they are presented, both in printed copy and online (Fourie, 2008:76). External gatekeepers, such as government and policy makers, as well as internal gatekeepers, for example the cost of production, influence the final selection news consumers see (Fourie, 2008:76).

White (cited by Fourie, 2008:77) researched different kinds of gatekeepers, including to reference to all factors “that have an influence on what appears in the different kinds of media” (Fourie, 2008:77). Fourie (2008:77) differentiates gatekeepers from regulators such as government and policies outside the news organisation. The board or owners of a news organisation can indeed influence the content of news media, however, are viewed as functioning as regulators rather than gatekeepers (Fourie, 2008:80). Fourie (2008:77) does not include operational factors such as the economy, strikes or cost of production as either gatekeepers or regulators. The published content on Netwerk24, and in the newspapers *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*, will be described in this study by utilising the gatekeeping theory

explained in this section, also in terms of the distinction between gatekeepers and regulators. The role of regulators on published content will be explored during the interviews with editors.

Criticism of gatekeeping theory (see 1.5.1) is mainly rooted in the belief that it implies one primary gate, has a simplistic view of how news originates and suggests individual selection (McQuail, 2010:309). One of the weak points of the concept of gatekeeping is that it is often seen to have one entrance and one set of selection criteria (McQuail, 2010:309). According to McQuail (2010:309) Shoemaker's 1991 research "extended the original model to take account of the wider social context and many factors at work. She draws attention to the role of advertisers, public relations, pressure groups, plus varied sources and news managers in influencing decisions".

Several recent articles reflect discussions by researchers regarding the increasing role of the internet on the traditional gatekeeping theory. A study by Witschge and Nygren (2009:55) suggests journalists' roles changed with the rise of internet as they are not controlling large amounts of knowledge available to audiences any longer. In the digital era, gatekeeping as "a theory, a model, a concept, a function and a role" has become fluid and the viability thereof is uncertain in academic literature (Vos & Thomas, 2019:398). The fluidity of gatekeeping is relevant to this study describing the workflow at the mentioned publications, because the researcher will aim to discover if the changed roles of journalists might impact the news processes, which in turn will answer the research question in Chapter 1.

The role of gatekeeping is researched by Vos and Thomas (2019:398). The study, based on an extensive corpus of metajournalistic discourse published between 2000 and 2017, found that gatekeeping was constructed as "old, declining, diminishing, and vanishing", maybe it "shifted or morphed" or was even "obsolete or unfeasible" (Vos & Thomas, 2019:410).

To many scholars, this negative view of gatekeeping seems to be the outcome in the "digital world and constricted economy" (Vos & Thomas, 2019:410). To Vos and Thomas (2019:410) "editorial direction and control" is delegitimised, but they write that other evidence shows "the role of editorial oversight [is] still maintaining legitimacy". The difficulties of the 2016 American elections, referring to the spread of fake news and the "inability (or unwillingness) of social media companies to proactively vet and steward the flow of information" in a sense revived the necessity of the "gatekeeping metaphor's normative force" (Vos & Thomas, 2019:410). The description of the workflow at the publications will also include role of editorial conferences in the news routines.

Vos and Thomas (2019:410) also found those defending the role of gatekeeping "tied the role's legitimacy to journalism's democratic obligations". Their study found efforts to

position “journalism of citizen participation and collaboration as gatekeeping’s natural successor”, but critics were found to offer “little in the way of a normative anchor for the audience collaboration ideas they offered as a replacement” (Vos & Thomas, 2019:410). “Journalists still make news judgments as part of their role and it is worth theorising and modelling the influences that come to bear on their judgments”, argues Vos & Thomas (2019:410).

Furthermore, other studies suggest additional new ways of viewing and adjusting the traditional gatekeeping theory.

A 2015 study with traditional gatekeeping theory in mind, suggest the idea of gate checkers (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2015:465). Gate checkers are to “select, verify, and curate visuals” after social media and the internet opened the traditional gates to the public. Schwalbe *et al.* (2015:478) write that “images and words cascade down a constant news stream that is too fast for traditional gatekeepers to control”. The gate checkers are now curators making sense of this information (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2015:478). “They must quickly select, verify, and disseminate visual and textual news and information via legacy media platforms,” state Schwalbe *et al.* (2015:478). In traditional gatekeeping theory the audience is seen as passive, this is however confronted with the “techno-active audience who often provide feedback on stories” (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2015:465). Their study concludes the 24-hour cycle of news combined with fast decision-making processes, causes that traditional gatekeepers do not have much impact as print deadlines are “too late” (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2015:465). In the constant news stream the “gate checkers perform a cleansing process that is critical to truth telling in the news ecosystem” (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2015:478). “Visual gate checkers at legacy media perform a vital role in maintaining the accuracy and credibility of the professional news sources on which citizens must rely for a clear view of world events”, write Schwalbe *et al.* (2015:479).

The concept of gate checkers will be tested with editors at the various publications in this study to see how they view their role in this process. Their opinions might shed light on their internal policies on news processes, which will approach responses to the research question (see Chapter 1).

Other significant changes occurred in and around gatekeeping theory in the digital era. “Way-finding is now just as important a framework as gatekeeping for studying news”, argue Pearson and Kosicki (2017:1088). Journalists changed how they conduct their work and therefore journalism studies should adapt to new ways of doing research (Pearson & Kosicki, 2017:1102). Pearson and Kosicki (2017:1103) conclude “the paths the users take, and how newsmakers help guide them through the mass of information, is the key to studying journalism in the digital age”. These researchers do not suggest “ignoring” gatekeeping theory, but as a

way to “improve our understanding of gatekeeping in the digital age” (Pearson & Kosicki, 2017:1102). The five areas in the concept of way-finding investigated in their research is “the increased capacity for storing and publishing news; new tools for news creation; increased use of aggregators and gate watchers; competition on a story-by-story basis; and immediate audience feedback” (Pearson & Kosicki, 2017:1088). This theory poses an interesting addition to the traditional gatekeeping theory which will be used in describing the flow of news at the researched publications during the analysis of the content and interviews.

Russell (2019:631) found that Silicon Valley, home to various new technology role players such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, was considered as a factor which impacted gatekeeping in journalism. His interviews found the technology role players view “audiences rather as consumers than citizens” (Russell, 2019:644). But the study found journalists and technologists “agreed that Silicon Valley platforms now hold an important gatekeeping role between journalists and news consumers” (Russell, 2019:645). Silicon Valley should be acknowledged as “an institutional force”, because it will impact the “path for the future of news and news gatekeeping” (Russell, 2019:645).

Vos and Russell (2019:1) also suggest the technology industry should be considered as new gatekeepers. Vos and Russell (2019:1) “suggest a new framework for assessing institutional influences on journalism and a reconsideration of how institutional power comes to shape news”. They view Silicon Valley as “disruptive institutional actors” (Vos & Russell, 2019:1). This new institutional power set the conditions for how much news can be distributed on platforms and the news industry does not have the leverage they used to have (Vos & Russell, 2019:1). They write “social system-level pressure would be necessary for Silicon Valley to take responsibility for this crisis. Journalism, in a relatively weak power position, cannot save itself alone” (Vos & Russell, 2019:15).

This new idea, that Silicon Valley is considered a gatekeeper, is relevant to this study as this researcher will incorporate the notion into the analysis of the content and interviews below. If Silicon Valley indeed influences Netwerk24 and the printed newspapers, as Russell suggests, it might be noticeable in the data.

New ideas, such as the idea mentioned above that Silicon Valley should be considered a gatekeeper, link up with Bro and Walberg’s suggestion that academic researchers should think of news values and gatekeeping in “new ways in order to capture current developments” (2014:453). In the social media-age, new types of gatekeepers already emerged and Bro and Walberg (2014:453) propose that “new [news] values have become important to understand the news stories audiences receive”. In Bro and Walberg’s (2014:453) words the tension between “known” and “unknown” “actors” is a factor in the “flow of news stories in the social

media”. They found that news articles about unknown actors that are popular on social media “have expressed or experienced something out of the ordinary – something grotesque and abnormal” (Bro & Walberg, 2014:453).

Still, many professional journalists explain that they are guided by “the ideals of objectivity and public service” (Waisbord, 2009:371) during the gatekeeping process.

According to McQuail (2010:311) early gatekeeping studies assumed “news selection was guided by an expert assessment of what would interest audiences”. However, later studies found there is a discrepancy between the audience interests and editorial judgements – thus “editors did not give audiences what they wanted” (McQuail, 2010:311). McQuail (2010:318) highlights various influences on news selection:

- power, status or fame of individuals involved in events;
- personal contacts of reporters;
- location of events;
- location of power;
- predictability and routine;
- proximity to the audience of people and events in the news;
- recency and timeliness of events;
- timing in relation to the news cycle; and
- Exclusivity and economic benefits.

One of the questions asked in the interviews with news workers will be if and how content is changed between publications. These influences on the news selection of the different publications might turn out to be helpful to guide the analysis of the interviews.

As gatekeepers “provide a picture of the world for the rest of us, it is thus vital for scholars to understand the gatekeeping process and its impact on the reality presented to the public” (Shoemaker *et al.*, 2009:73). They continue:

The gatekeeper controls whether information passes through the channel and what its final outcome is. Gatekeepers take many forms, for example: people, professional codes of conduct, company policies, and computer algorithms. All gatekeepers make decisions, but they have varying degrees of autonomy. (Shoemaker *et al.* 2009:74)

According to them “[t]he model strongly suggests that the main reason for media distortion is the need to narrow a multitude of happenings in the world to a modest number that eventually make the news” (Shoemaker *et al.*, 2009:76).

This researcher argues that new and unusual gatekeepers such as Silicon Valley should be included in the traditional view of gatekeeping theory. The theories of news selection and news values prompted the interview questions posed to individual participants in this study, for example: how and which technology and social media is used in the workflow and operations of the publications? In the content analysis that will be conducted, this researcher will seek to find differences in news values between the different platforms, as well as find non-traditional gatekeepers in the news flow, to answer the research question presented in Chapter 1.

3.5 News values

To define news, and news values, has been attempted by many scholars and consensus is yet to be reached (Fourie, 2008:234; Croteau *et al.*, 2011:125; Conley & Lamble, 2009:82, Barker & Jane, 2017:404,405). The latter state:

Journalists determine news values because that is their job. How well they do it depends on a variety of factors, not all of which are in their control. They cannot increase newsroom budgets to broaden and deepen news coverage. Higher staffing levels might afford more time for reflection on news values and the fuller development of important news angles. (Conley & Lamble, 2009:101)

Harcup and O'Neill (2001:279) revisited the seminal work of Galtung and Ruge on news values (see 1.5.1). They then proposed a contemporary list of news values, but 15 years later they updated their own 2001-list accepting no list “will ever explain everything” (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017:1470, 1482). Their 2017-list is:

- Exclusivity: Stories generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on.
- Bad news: Stories with particularly negative overtones such as death, injury, defeat and loss (of a job, for example).
- Conflict: Stories concerning conflict such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare.

- Surprise: Stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them.
- Audio-visuals: Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics.
- Share ability: Stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media.
- Entertainment: Soft stories concerning sex, show business, sport, lighter human interest, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, witty headlines or lists.
- Drama: Stories concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles or court cases.
- Follow-up: Stories about subjects already in the news.
- The power elite: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations, institutions or corporations.
- Relevance: Stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential with, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience.
- Magnitude: Stories perceived as sufficiently significant in the large numbers of people involved or in potential impact or involving a degree of extreme behaviour or extreme occurrence.
- Celebrity: Stories concerning people who are already famous.
- Good news: Stories with particularly positive overtones such as recoveries, breakthroughs, cures, wins and celebrations.
- News organisation's agenda: Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda, whether ideological, commercial or as part of a specific campaign.

The argument is that what news values are and how they are implemented in news organisations have a direct or an indirect influence on news processes. When performing the content analysis the above-mentioned news values will be considered.

3.5.1 Audience and news values

Fourie (2008:235) proposes distance and intensity scales that also contribute to understanding news values. This suggests the "higher an event scores on all these values, the more likely it will 'become' news".

The tension between being a publication that maintains its independence but being read by readers and incorporating their likes and dislikes is explored during interview questions. It

is important when viewing news values, however, to keep in mind that what news is, is answered differently by news professionals and their audience.

An older study of Strömbäck *et al.* (2012:719) establishes a difference between what journalists view as news, versus what becomes news. The study suggests that when journalists decide on the importance of events that will become news, the “event properties” seems “to be less important than they should be” (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2012:725). On the other hand, when journalists make decisions about audience interest, “production routines and economic considerations” seems more important than they should be (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2012:725).

Event properties related to the democratic role of the media in democracy do not, according to Swedish journalists, matter as much for the actual news selection as they should, while event properties related to perceived audience interest, production routines and economic considerations matter more than they should do. (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2012:726)

This study about Swedish journalists strongly suggests “there is both a conceptual and empirical difference between news selection and news values, news and standards of newsworthiness” (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2012:726). This researcher will consider these differences when the above-mentioned tension about the influence of audience interest on news content is addressed in the interviews and the analysis thereof.

3.5.2 Ideology

Lastly, the issue of ideology must be mentioned before applying the theory of news values to the content and interview data. O’Neill and Harcup (2009:164) cites John Richardson who argues lists of news values “downplay the issue of ideology”. The same study also cites Lange (O’Neill & Harcup, 2009:169) who “found that the socio-political environment in which journalists operated . . . did affect their news values.” Some of the news values that changes in a developing country, is the larger emphasis on “direct exhortations”, news stories set in the future, about co-operation and on positive evaluations of the news subject (O’Neill & Harcup, 2009:169). According to O’Neill and Harcup (2009:170) some studies indicate news values can “become subordinate to national loyalties” and that “the closer journalists were to a news event in terms of national interest, the less likely they were to apply professional news values”. O’Neill and Harcup (2009:170) also cites Ndlela pointing out the “assumption that adherence to news values in implicitly more ‘professional’, elimination bias, political or otherwise . . .

can be problematic in that news values may create uniformity, negativity and reduction to stereotypes”.

One could argue that constant industry changes requires that theories such as news values and gatekeeping be revised on a continuous basis, as this study does.

3.6 Summary

The importance of describing news routines was shown in 3.2 together with suggestions on incorporating it into the data analysis. This include Tuchman’s suggestion that stories should be grouped as scheduled or unscheduled.

The theory of news selection in 3.3 was shown to be of value in this study as the *Netwerk24*, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* select stories from one another to use in their respective publications.

CHAPTER 4: Research design and methodology

4.1 A qualitative approach

A qualitative research approach is used in this study as it aims “to interpret and construct the qualitative aspects” (Du Plooy, 2009:30) of news processes. This study uses qualitative interviews and qualitative content analysis. The application of these different methods of data collection will ensure triangulation.

Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is a plan of action that will raise sociologists [and other social science researchers] above the personal biases that stem from single methodologies. By combining methods and investigators in the same study, observers can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigator or method. (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:275, citing Denzin)

Ontological assumptions associated with qualitative research include the arguments of modernists that “knowledge could be acquired by discovering reality through the eyes of people who experience it” (Du Plooy, 2009:31). Modernist arguments after 1970, leading to critical theory, are however more relevant to this study holding that “reality can only be constructed (not discovered)” (Du Plooy, 2009:31).

That reality can only be constructed guides the methodology in this study, that is the data gathering (see 4.4) and data analysis (see 4.5). Unlike quantitative research, this qualitative study expects variations of follow up questions and answers in the semi-structured interviews. “Diversity and dialogue contribute to a more complete understanding of an organisation as a social environment” (Du Plooy, 2009:37).

The findings of a single news event at the publication might be generalised to other news events at the same publications, but not universally to other news organisations or their covering of news events.

4.2 Case study

Different types of case studies are possible, according to Babbie and Mouton (2009:281). They list (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:281):

- the individual case study: also referred to as a life history;

- community studies: this focus on the “description and analysis of the patterns of, and relations between the main aspects of community life”;
- social group studies: can be used to study small direct contact groups and larger more diffuse groups;
- studies of organisations and institutions: it is mostly used in business and management studies;
- studies of events, roles and relationships: this type focus on a specific event; and
- studies of countries and nations is typical in studies about international and comparative politics of one or more countries.

A case study design was chosen for this study, because it is ideal to describe communities and studies of events as explained above. This study will dive into patterns and relations at the publications as well focus on a specific event.

This case study of the three printed publications and the news website of the South African media company Media24, focuses on a selected news event discovering roles and relationships in order to answer the research question (see Chapter 1).

Case studies as a qualitative method has been criticised by researchers in favour of the quantitative tradition in the last half a century, but Babbie and Mouton (2009:280) write “case study research has become ‘scientifically respectable’” in recent decades. It is defined as “an intensive investigation of a single unit”, however a unit may have many individual units (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:281).

Since the mid 1980s, and especially during the 1990s, communication researchers have continued to toil with the question: how can we provide a qualitative, yet authentic, (re-)construction of subjects’ communicative experiences? This meant revisiting requirements such as the reliability and validity of observations and generalisation of findings that are basic to quantitative (empirical) research. Although no definitive answer has been found to the above question, it did contribute to the development of cultural studies, feminist research and participatory research. (Du Plooy, 2009:32)

The development of qualitative methodologies gave way to participatory research where the “researchers and the subjects being studied had to move closer to one another, to the extent of becoming co-researchers” (Du Plooy, 2009:32).

This case study uses a single unit, which is a news event: the Schweizer-Reneke Primary School racism incident of 2019. The unit however has many individual units, which is the multiple articles written about the event and included in the sample for this study, as well as the participants selected for interviews.

Du Plooy (2009:180) describes case studies as “flexible and often responsive to the demands and circumstances of the research problem”, which is necessary for the research question asked in this study (see Chapter 1).

Other characteristics of case studies include (Du Plooy, 2009:181,182):

- The researcher can use various data sources to build a Gestalt of the organisation;
- It is useful to investigate people’s experiences;
- It can describe processes of development; and
- Case studies are flexible in that the researcher can structure the design according to the available funds, time and subjects, as well as the social setting.

4.3 Methods

4.3.1 Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis will be used because the “latent meaning is regarded as more essential” than manifesting content for this study (McQuail, 2010:363).

There are many concerns when using qualitative content analysis as a method of study. Traditionally the pitfalls include a risk of “imposing a meaning system rather than discovering it in the content” and the results will “diverge from the original source material” (McQuail, 2010:362-363). In this study this problem will be ruled out as far as possible by triangulation in the form of using interviews with staff of the newspapers, interviews with staff of Netwerk24 as well as a qualitative content analysis of both print and digital platforms.

Canter (2018:1102) points out that fluidity is a problem posed by new media when content analysis is used to analyse news values on digital native websites. Digital native websites refer to news websites that did not originate when traditional media migrated to the internet, but websites that were “born” on the internet. Although Netwerk24 is not a digital native website, it shares the problem of fluidity addressed in this study by Canter.

The problem of fluidity in Canter’s study of native digital websites is that content analysis was used for centuries on static content but poses difficulties on websites where “content is fluid with news stories and news pages being updated at irregular and unpredictable intervals” (Canter, 2018:1104). In this study the fluidity of the content and difficulty with sampling are regarded as the main problems with liquid content analysis, particularly when

studying so called digital native websites (Canter, 2018:1105). Although Canter focuses more on digital native websites that updates their news feed with algorithms, which differs to the publications in this study, it still illustrates the potential mutual difficulty of fluidity.

The newsfeed on Netwerk24 is manually controlled by an editor and not altered by algorithms, but the problem of fluidity remains a valid concern since, especially the news, sport and business sections, are also being updated at irregular and unpredictable times.

To overcome the problems with fluidity and sampling on news websites, Canter proposes the adoption of a “malleable approach to content analysis to transfer latent coding methods across the fluid landscape of online liquid journalism” (Canter, 2018:1110). Canter (2018:1110) further suggests the researcher should understand the organisations thoroughly. The researcher is an employee at the relevant division of company since 2013, however does not build on personal experience but rather on empirical research designs and methods. See 4.5.1 for more on content analysis of fluid content.

4.3.2. Interviews

This method is used to describe and understand the human behaviour in the news processes at the selected publications. According to Babbie and Mouton (2009:270,271) qualitative methods, such as the interviews, can provide the researcher with insider information.

Although qualitative study method guidelines prescribe the participants to be at their “natural setting” (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:270), due to time and financial constraints this researcher will include telephonic and email interviews with some participants where necessary – even though they might not be at their working desk at the time of the interview. This is done to ensure the response rate of the sample is high enough for data gathering. The researcher conducting the interviews “should attempt to become more than just a participant observer in the natural setting that is being investigated” to the extent of putting “themselves in the shoes of the people they are observing and studying and try and understand their actions, decisions, behaviour, practices, rituals and so on, from their perspective” (Babbie and Mouton, 2009:271). As mentioned before, one of the advantages is that this researcher is also an employee of the researched publications collectively.

Fourie (2009:494) explains that in-depth interviews “creates an atmosphere of trust where the participants can elaborate on feelings, recollections and opinions”.

The interviews conducted in this study is done to investigate processes at the publications, while the employee’s “perspective is emphasised” and in-depth descriptions are asked (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:270). As traditional qualitative research methodology suggests,

it is of importance how the respondents view their role as an insider (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:271). An important emphasis will thus be on the participant's interpretative understanding, the subjectivity of the participants and the overall context of the operation.

Fourie (2009:495) suggests commencing the interview with a short summary, followed by "truly open-ended questions" and then only pursuing sensitive questions.

As is mostly accepted regarding qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalised to other news organisations (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:270), however, an industry under pressure, such as the news industry, the innovation by industry leaders should arguably be academically described and researched.

Babbie and Mouton (2009:257) state that when telephone interviews are used, the questions and the answers of the respondents are not influenced by their impression of the interviewer, her appearance or dress code. The researcher has not met all the participants in person but has indeed previously interacted with them via the internet for professional purposes.

Babbie and Mouton's (2009:257) view is that some respondents might be more honest when they do not interact with the interviewer face-to-face, which is not possible to determine here, but could be seen as an advantage because face-to-face interviews might not always be practically possible.

Face-to-face interviews are an elusive goal, as many of the media professionals are located in cities far from each other, namely Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Cape Town. Due to the financial and time constraints of this study, this researcher will not travel to two of the cities. To ensure a high response rate in the limited time available to collect the data, respondents who opt to rather answer the semi-structure interview questions in an email and agree to follow up questions, will be able to do so.

The advantages of email interviews are that the researcher will not need additional time to transcribe the interviews after it was recorded while any introverted participants will have additional time to think their answers through. This option will furthermore limit the participant's impression of the interviewer with thus in turn, less impact on the data.

The advantages of conducting an in-person interview, ranges from the ability to easily request clarification of an unclear statement made by the participant, as well as to elaborate regarding a too short remark made, while more detailed discussions can be facilitated by way of asking to follow up questions. Here the researcher will play a significant role and thus create an impression, with potentially a larger impact on the data.

As can be seen from this discussion, both kinds of interviews have advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage of an email interview is that the participant might not answer

the questions thoroughly, not answer follow up questions later or might hurry through the questions. During in-person interviews, however, the participants might be difficult to keep on track of the discussion. These potential pitfalls will be guarded against during the data gathering phase.

4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 Description of the website and news app

The publication's app will be described after downloading it to an iPhone6s. Users can allow the app to send them push notifications (PNs) which could range from choices as to receive PNs for breaking news, news, sport, business and the commentary section.

The homepage of the website contains 30 articles from across the platform, including the magazines, which can be accessed elsewhere on the website. The 30 articles on the website change constantly throughout the day with up to five hot topics being presented at the top of the page. Widgets for specific news events, such as the South African election or the recent Cricket World Cup, are live on this page from time to time. Five headlines are changed constantly with the changing topic of the day's news seen on both the website (to the right) and on the app (below the first article) while app and website users will see advertisements on the homepage. A list of the five most read articles are also available on the website.

Mast heads of the publications are seen in the drop-down menu on the app and on the bar at the top of the homepage. These include both the three daily newspapers discussed in the next section as well as magazines not examined in detail in this study.

These newspapers have a presence on the Netwerk24 website after their mastheads fell away when the site was founded in 2014. The logos were re-introduced online in September 2017. The web presence includes a section on the website and app where a selection of the content of the day's printed edition, for each *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* and *Volksblad* is placed. This selection can also include content not seen in the printed edition – for example letters that was not in the printed edition, articles about projects the newspaper supports (but not Netwerk24), or columns a paper would have preferred to print, but where a lack of space precluded the option.

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, another app, MySubs24, is available for subscribers where they can view digital images of the pages of most of the printed titles. This electronic platform inter alia keeps the newspapers published in January 2019 in the public domain. This researcher will download the relevant copies of the three newspapers from this app to see how the online articles were published in print.

The app also has access to the landing pages created for *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* on Netwerk24. The URLs to these landing pages are the same than the previous ones used for the websites of the newspapers, prior to the founding of Netwerk24. They are www.beeld.com, www.dieburger.com and www.volksblad.com. These landing pages are populated each publication day with content used in the relevant newspaper, including an image of the front page. News items specific to the newspapers, that are not relevant to Netwerk24 are also available to readers on this page.

4.4.2 Sampling and gathering online and printed content

To narrow the data down to a manageable size, this study is focused on a single news event to serve as an example on the workflow on news stories published in all four publications. The incident of alleged racism at the Schweizer-Reneke Primary School on 9 January 2019 was chosen as focus point. This event was chosen because it was widely reported on, in fact covered for months following the incident.

Therefore, a search on the news website was conducted to find all news content about the event. However, in order to keep the data to a manageable limit, only the articles published in the news section during a time period were admitted to the sample. The timeframe dates from Wednesday 9 January, when Netwerk24 published the first article, until Friday 18 January, to include seven newspaper publication days.

The Netwerk24 homepage is not static, by its nature, rather fluid as it is changed often. Canter (2018:1104) writes about the problem of news websites “being updated at irregular and unpredictable intervals” for academic studies. Fluidity indeed poses challenges to this study as the researcher cannot do an online content analysis to compare for example the homepage versus the front page of the newspaper as the homepage changes constantly.

In this study the researcher uses stories published months before and thus they are not used any more on the homepage or as headlines but are available in archives. It will thus not be possible to accurately determine if the articles were used on the homepage or only on the news page at the time of reporting.

Netwerk24 published 29 articles about the event during the seven-day period. The first article was published at 17:20 on Wednesday 9 January. The next day a team including a photographer, videographer and journalists went to the town of Schweizer-Reneke and a total of six articles were published between 10:07 and 21:42 on Thursday 10 January. The rest of the articles included in the sample for this study were published until Thursday 17 January. See a list of the complete sample of 53 articles and details about them in Appendix B.

The newspapers printed the first article about the event on Friday 11 January, two days after the digital platform. During the seven-day period *Beeld* published nine articles, *Die Burger* nine and *Volksblad* six. See a list of the complete sample of 53 articles and details about them in Appendix B.

4.4.3 Sampling participants

Face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and email interviews are used for this study. The participants chosen for interviews are the employees at the publications concerned with the workflow or the policies at the publications.

The observations made during the literature review, theoretical considerations and the qualitative content analysis, informed the questions asked in the interviews.

The number of employees interviewed at each publication differs, because the number of employees and the workflow at each publication are different. This researcher obtained consent from the editor-in-chief to organise interviews with the participants. Consent forms will be sent to the participants prior to the interviews. The consent forms will be administered via email and the participants will be telephonically called or contacted by email.

A purposive sampling method has been used to identify 17 participants to be interviewed. The non-probability sampling method is used because only a limited number of people can serve as primary data sources due to the nature of the research design (Research-methodology, 2019). The 17 people were chosen to include people in key roles of the workflow, including the editor-in-chief of Netwerk24. The interviews will be done according to a semi-structured list of questions designed to leave margin for additional information and follow up questions. After obtaining permission from interviewee's the interviews will be recorded on the personal iPhone6s of the researcher (Fourie, 2009:494). The researcher will transcribe and translate the interviews from Afrikaans to English. All interviewee's will be asked on their informed consent form if they would wish to opt to answer the questions anonymously, and study data will be handled and presented accordingly. All personal information will be handled confidentially and destroyed after the study has been published.

The sample of interviewees consists of the following people:

- The four editors of the four publications, Netwerk24, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* as they decide on policies and accept responsibility for the publications. However, only two agreed to take part in the study: Henriëtte Loubser, editor-in-chief of Netwerk24 and Gert Coetzee, editor of *Volksblad*;

- Four of the senior editorial staff, including deputy and assistant editors at the online and printed publications. Two agreed to be a part of the study: Vernon Janse van Rensburg at *Beeld* and Christo van Staden at *Volksblad*;
- A member of the national content editorial team for newspapers who alters copy for the printed newspapers took part in the study, Annalize Dedekind;
- A news editor from a region of Netwerk24 who in their role as collective gatekeeper has an impact on the flow of news for all four publications. The participant, Charles Smith, agreed to take part in the study;
- One of the digital homepage editors at Netwerk24 agreed to be a part of the study, but the participant chose to remain anonymous;
- One of the digital newspaper content managers agreed to be a part of the study, David Engelbrecht;
- A sub-editor agreed to take part in the study, but the participant chose to remain anonymous;
- To keep the data to a manageable amount, this researcher chose other direct role players who covered the chosen news event including a journalist, a videographer, a photographer and a blogger. Other people were involved in the same capacity, but not included in the sample. One journalist, who chose to be anonymous, agreed to take part in the study.

4.5 Data analysis

The matter of objectivity should be addressed as the researcher is an employee at the publications and receives a study allowance from the company. However, the researcher will overcome potential problems regarding objectivity, validity and reliability by only using original information provided by interviewee's and information in the public domain, gathered as part of the literature review and content analysis.

4.5.1 Analysing content

Although the 2018 study of Canter focuses on native news websites and not legacy media, the study elaborates on conducting content analysis while experiencing the problems of fluidity and "online liquid journalism" (2018:1110).

The malleable approach suggested in his study implies fitting the traditional research methods to gain the necessary data without losing reliability, and it therefore incorporates a

thorough understanding of the news organisation that is studied (Canter, 2018:1110). The study concludes the liquidity of news websites are about more than only immediacy and multimedia content. The multiple access points to consume the content is a “greater challenge” (Canter, 2018:1110) and therefore data is collected from printed articles, online articles and interviews.

Canter (2018:1109) uses a sample of 20 stories captured on the relevant websites once a day during three random constructed weeks across a six-month period in his study. Although his chosen sample is not practical for this study, it shows the alternative to the content analysis used in print newspapers during the last decades before the internet. This researcher argues in the print era content analysis was performed on static content that did not change. The solution in Canter (2018:1109) to use the content as they are at a given time is adapted to this study. The implications are accepted, including that if the articles in the sample changed since the first publication until the data was captured, the researcher will be unaware of this in the data.

The data for the content analysis was gathered online on 13 July 2019 and the printed content on 22 August 2019. Changes to the online content after it was gathered is excluded from this study and changes before it was gathered is not elaborated on.

Analysing the online and printed content should help to reach the research goals (see Chapter 1):

RG1: describe the flow of online news articles at Netwerk24 referring to the theories of gatekeeping and news values in the example of the Schweizer-event;

RG2: describe the flow and selection process of articles about the Schweizer-event in *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*.

To reach these goals, the researcher will match the articles published online to their printed versions. They will be compared.

The articles in the sample drawn during 10 days from Wednesday 9 January 2019 until Friday 18 January 2019 is grouped in seven groups. The articles including mostly the same set of facts were grouped together, for example: on Wednesday 9 January and on Thursday 10 January articles were only published online, and the facts reported on in these articles were only published in print on Friday 11 January. These articles were grouped together and the same method was followed throughout to form the seven groups seen in 5.2.

4.5.2 Analysing interviews

The answers from the interviews will be discussed according to themes emerging from the data to explain the chronological flow of the news content. Each step will be discussed in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5 and 6.

Interviews were planned to answer the why and who questions that surfaces during the content analysis in order to shed light on the findings in the content analysis.

The topics planned and unplanned, that emerged from the qualitative interviews, including follow up questions (see complete list of interview questions in appendix A), are grouped together in 5.4 where the data is discussed.

4.5.3 Ethics

This researcher has disclosed in this research to be an employee at the researched titles. However, the researcher completed the ethical clearance from the University of Stellenbosch to protect the participants and to avoid a conflict of interest.

CHAPTER 5: Data analysis and research findings

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter this researcher will discuss the data collected in the content analysis (5.2) as well as the data collected during the qualitative interviews (5.3). Also, a detailed discussion on the content of the interviews is presented (5.4). How the content analysis and the interviews relate to the research goals is addressed in 5.5 and 5.6.

5.2 Data: content analysis

5.2.1 Group one: Differences and similarities

The first article about the Schweizer-event that was published on Netwerk24 on 9 January 2019 was published before official comment from the school was received, according to the facts in the article. This article was not published the next day in the printed newspapers.

On 10 January Netwerk24 carried five articles by three different journalists and a blog that was updated with the latest information from 11:10 until 15:19 during the day.

The newspapers carried a summary of the articles published online on 9 and 10 January in their printed edition on 11 January. On this day, the three newspapers carried the article on their front page. *Beeld* also carried a second article on page 4.

Beeld and *Volksblad* published both photographs, the version of the article, the blocks with additional information, headlines and used a similar layout. The newer photograph taken by staff on the 10th is used, being used larger than the original, older photograph that sparked off the discussion on social media, two days before (see 1.4). *Die Burger* on the other hand, used a very similar version of the article, a very similar headline, the same two blocks with extra information, but only the older, original photograph with a slightly different layout. *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* also used the article on the front page, but only the similar headline, article and the older photograph.

The articles on Netwerk24 and *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* and *Volksblad* are all written by the same two journalists. The third journalist mentioned earlier only has a byline on the web, and not in the printed articles.

This researcher's deduction from these differences and similarities is that the three printed newspapers and the digital platform Netwerk24 shares the same newsroom and uses the content produced by journalists for both platforms. The articles are rewritten and blended

to highlight the most important facts and in order to fit into the space constraints in the printed versions. This is seen in the bylines of the online and printed articles.

5.2.2 Group two: Differences and similarities

Netwerk24 followed the event up with two articles on Friday 11 January. These articles were an ongoing blog from 10:28 until 16:22, as well as an article with a new angle of the event published at 16:21. The blog mentioned here, has a different layout on the web and this researcher observes that it is less frequently updated than the blog mentioned in 5.2.1. It includes one of the same bylines seen in the reporting in 5.2.1, and yet another new byline.

Beeld and *Volksblad* carried follow up articles about the event on Saturday 12 January. These articles were a wrap of the mini-blog and the new article published the previous day. *Die Burger* however, did not publish an article on the event.

This arguably demonstrates the independence of the newsrooms of the newspapers in that they choose whether to carry the article or not. Furthermore, this example certainly highlights the importance of the role of an experienced rewriter, able to deliver a timely summary of events to the newspaper. The different bylines might also point to the collaboration and teamwork between newsrooms.

5.2.3 Group three: Differences and similarities

On Saturday 12 January Netwerk24 published a new angle on the event at 19:02, as well as two articles on the next day. These two articles published on Sunday 13 January are copy marked as originating from *Rapport*, a major weekly newspaper on Sundays; in fact being part of this media group, although not included in the in depth analyses of this study to keep the data to a manageable amount and because their newsroom is not shared with the chosen publications.

It was significant to note that these articles, in contrast to other Netwerk24 articles, were published at 00:00 and 00:17 on the day of publication.

From this observation, this researcher argues the copy from *Rapport* is still published in the traditional way *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* used to do, prior to implementation of the digital first strategy.

On Monday 14 January a single article appeared on the front page of *Beeld*, while this article was only seen on Netwerk24 later that same day, which is different from the intervals at which the articles discussed in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 were published.

This article appeared at 6:15 the morning the printed *Beeld* was available to the public, which is different from the pattern seen in the articles discussed above, wherein the articles are mostly published first online and in print the next day. It seems as if this article was not published according to the digital first strategy.

5.2.4 Group four: Differences and similarities

Five articles on the event was published on Netwerk24 on Monday 14 January. This includes the earliest article published at 6:15 mentioned in 5.2.3. From the content of the three articles published 8:27, 13:07 and 17:38 from the same journalist this researcher observes the journalist monitors the event throughout the day and took fresh photographs. From the content and photographs the presence of a team is not visible. The articles were published not long after events, showing how the digital first strategy functions. The last one of the five articles published for the day was written by another journalist, Alet van der Walt. This article does not show if the journalist was on scene, with this researcher thus arguing that it might have been written from another geographical area.

The next day, Tuesday 15 January, in line with a digital first strategy, *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* and *Volksblad* all carried an article on the event. This article was a wrap of the articles published on the digital platform, with none of these very similar articles published on the front page.

One could argue from these observations the digital first strategy implies repurposing online content for the printed newspapers and that it was adhered to at this time.

5.2.5 Group five: Differences and similarities

On Tuesday 15 January five articles were published online about the event.

The first article is a blog that was updated from 11:55 until 13:12. The blog was updated live, minute by minute giving the audience almost immediate information. One could infer from the published content, a journalist, Christiaan du Plessis, and a photographer, Deaan Vivier, was present at the event.

The second article was a statement of the teacher involved, however not including reporting from a journalist. The third article include a summary of the main facts about the event and a video of the event. A fourth article by the journalist, with a different video made by the team, is a wrap of the blog and other articles published earlier the day. The last article is by a different journalist, Susan Cilliers and provides a new angle on the event.

The next day, on Wednesday 16 January, the printed newspapers all carried the event on their front pages. All the publications published a very similar version of the wrap by Christiaan du Plessis and a version of the new angle of Susan Cilliers with a new photograph from the staff photographer. *Beeld* furthermore, carried a full inside news page with two articles relating the event to the current political climate in the country. This page is excluded from the sample as the sample excludes interpretation and comment; it is however alluded to as it was published on a news page. The comment published on the news page illustrates the interpretive focus of the newspapers in the news they publish.

On par with the observation in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2., this group also demonstrates the summary of facts and developments on the blog, the repurposing of content between the online platform utilising a digital first strategy and the collaboration with the printed newspaper staff.

5.2.6 Group six: Differences and similarities

Netwerk24 published three articles on Wednesday 16 January. The first was a blog by Susan Cilliers, which was updated live from 11:07 until 14:37. Content included tweets, photographs and videos produced by the team. A second article by Andrea Küssel was published at 13:40 with a video produced by the team. The researcher was able to discern from the content, that the two articles by different journalists were written in different geographical areas. The third article for the day was also written by Susan Cilliers, being a wrap of the blog she did earlier the day.

Beeld, *Die Burger*, *Die Burger Oos-Kaap* and *Volksblad* all carried a wrap of the events of the previous day in their editions on Thursday 17 January, with only *Volksblad* placing the article on the front page.

This researcher concludes the pattern of wraps of the online articles used in the printed editions continue here as mentioned in 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.5.

5.2.7 Group seven: Differences and similarities

Altogether four articles were published about the event on Netwerk24 on Thursday 17 January, with three being written by Susan Cilliers. They were published at 9:34, 12:51 and 13:52. The fourth one, containing only the full documents handed in to the court and no journalistic reporting, was published at 16:49.

The next day, on Friday 18 January, a wrap of the articles published on the previous day on Netwerk24 was published as a newspaper article, with once again *Volksblad* as well as *Beeld* carrying it on their front pages, with *Die Burger* printing it on an inside page.

This researcher argues that the online platform uses their space by publishing the full original court documents that would not have been possible in the printed newspapers with its traditional constraints on space. The pattern of repurposing of content is also seen.

5.3 Insights about the content analysis

The content analysis, inspired by the literature review and theoretical framework, prompted the interview questions.

It is clear from the content analysis that the news is repurposed and often changed by writing wraps and then combining follow up articles with new information,

This researcher also argues that these articles were well read and interacted with by readers, according to the user comments below the articles. The news values listed in 3.5 are also evident in the news articles. Of the 15 news values listed, this researcher argues that eight can be found in the articles collectively, being conflict, surprise, share ability, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance and magnitude.

5.4 Interviews

5.4.1 Interviews with Netwerk24 employees

The six participants employed at Netwerk24 have much experience as editorial staff in the news industry, mostly in print journalism such as journalists, newspaper editors, subeditors and layout artists. All six participants were involved in the writing or production of the articles regarding the alleged racism event at Schweizer-Reneke Primary School. Of the six participants three decided to remain anonymous.

5.4.2 Interviews with newspaper employees

Of the four participants at the different newspapers two were involved in the writing or production of the articles about the alleged racism event at Schweizer-Reneke Primary School. The other two were not directly involved, however they played crucial roles in the production chain and was indeed invaluable to this study.

5.5 Insights from the interviews

The insights gained from the interviews with Netwerk24 and print staff, are discussed below according to themes that emerged from the data.

5.5.1 Roles of news workers in the news routines

The news routines demand certain roles be fulfilled. In this section, nine roles in this process will be discussed. At Netwerk24 they are the roles of editor-in-chief, news editor, journalist, homepage editor, sub editor and content editor. The roles discussed at the newspapers are the role of typographical editor, rewriter and assistant newspaper editor.

Henriëtte Loubser, the editor-in-chief of Netwerk24, is responsible for the content on Netwerk24, also on a legal level. Loubser has the final say on news articles, but unlike her previous roles at printed publications, she does not see most of the articles before they are printed. “The cycle is too fast,” she remarked in the interview. Intervening if the publication is in error is her task, however she does not recall doing this regarding the Schweizer-event (Loubser, 2019b).

The editor-in-chief role would entail overseeing the morning meetings where articles would be discussed and approved, proposed by the news editors for follow up for the day. This role includes providing the general direction of articles pursued, and to lead, guide and give feedback where necessary.

As editor-in-chief, Loubser’s role furthermore include planning for big news events, for example the mini-website that was built for the Krugersdorp murder case, the Rugby World Cup 2019 and the national election in May 2019. In these cases, Netwerk24 build a special mini-website in advance of the event giving more information and having more features than the website generally has.

The news head in the central region of South Africa is Charles Smith. His role is mostly to determine how news will be covered and which news the newsroom will cover (Smith, 2019). He manages the newsroom and make operational decisions when there might be little news hints on a day for the number of journalists available or when there are too many news articles to be done for the number of journalists available (Smith, 2019). When news hints are few, Smith (2019) must find more story ideas. When Smith arrives at 8:00 at the office, he should already know how his team will do which stories (Smith, 2019).

According to Smith (2019) traditional news sources and ways to get news has changed dramatically with social media and nowadays news editors must be very aware of how stories are done.

A global change in the role of a journalist is understood because in the digital era anyone can be a part of the publishing process (Loubser, 2019b). The ways of gathering news and being a journalist has changed, but not the tradition of getting the news to package it (Smith, 2019). Journalists must be faster (Smith, 2019), as news are published faster on social media than in the days of print which forces news workers to follow stories better and finding unique angles (Loubser, 2019b). How journalists think and approach news changed, because it is possible to have web stories consisting of only photographs or videos (Smith, 2019). This was also the case in the Schweizer-event, where a single video with background facts was published as an article (see 5.2.5).

Another way in which the role of journalists changed, is that journalists had specific beats, such as writing politics or crime, but currently all journalists write about all topics (Coetzee, 2019). Only a few journalists in Netwerk24's central newsroom are still mostly writing a certain beat because beats such as crime, court and politics require very specific sources to do the story fast (Coetzee, 2019). All journalists, however, was not used to having a beat. An anonymous journalist (2019a) argued that journalists at community newspapers also often not have beats and even took their own photographs, unlike at large publications, where a team of photographers were employed. The participant explained at the time of the interview most journalists at Netwerk24 took photographs themselves while photographers are available for big news (Anon, 2019a). Other skills journalists are learning, are to take videos and to blog live (Anon, 2019a).

"It is not a part of a journalist's everyday work to put news in context for the readers," (Anon, 2019c). Investigative journalism, the heart of journalism before digital news, has become specialised to the extent that special units now exists for this task (Anon, 2019c). Fake news brings an even heavier responsibility to journalists to actively expose false information and prove the fake information wrong (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). This aspect has an influence on news routines and the published content, also while reporting on the Schweizer-event (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). News workers have to verify more, while acknowledging this was also part of the pre-digital responsibilities of news workers (Anon, 2019b). There are more unverified comments and sources available and the task is to be very sure of information (Anon, 2019b).

The news routines have to be adjusted a bit as you are not only gathering new information for the actual story, but also following many false leads to figure out if they are true. The influence on the published content is that there should be taken much more care to be sure that all information is correct. (Janse van Rensburg, 2019)

An anonymous subeditor is of the opinion that many journalists are not much more than news gatherers (Anon, 2019c). Currently, getting the story out to the reader first as fast as possible is more important than a well-rounded article that was considered from all angles answering all readers' questions (Anon, 2019c). The roles of journalists arguably changed in different degrees at various publications.

An anonymous homepage editor explained this role as the last eye on news content before it is published. A homepage editor tracks the flow of important articles through the process to be sure the process runs smooth, including speeding up the flow of breaking news and reporting practical system errors (Anon, 2019b). The homepage editor looks for gaps in the stories, checking if it adheres to legal guidelines and act as gatekeeper (Anon, 2019b). The homepage editor also changes the order of copy on the homepage, sends out PNs, changes thumbnails, changes headlines and are responsible for the quality of the homepage.

Various homepage editors also administer blogs on Netwerk24 in situations where few news workers are available, especially in the evening or on weekends (Anon, 2019b). The bylines on blogs goes to the person who is actually doing the work, usually the journalist, but if the blogger is also searching for information, this person might also get a byline (Anon, 2019b, Engelbrecht, 2019).

The role of the team of about 10 language professionals are responsible for editing all copy for Netwerk24 in shifts from 6:00 until 23:00 daily, including weekends. The editing tasks include the correction of spelling and grammar, translating, writing headlines and checking facts are as true and reasonable as possible (Anon, 2019c). The newspapers also employ language professionals.

According to the subeditor journalists are becoming more junior which causes the subediting team to function more as safety net by focusing more on finding factual mistakes, to be sure the relevant facts are in the articles and that all articles adhere to the law before they are published (Anon, 2019c). This team prevents fake news, factual mistakes, breaches of the media laws and Press Code in everything published: videos, promotional copy, graphics and news copy (Anon, 2019c). This team also teach coworkers to write better (Anon, 2019c). In

the process of rewriting, the subediting team keeps contact with the journalist and news editor (Anon, 2019c).

The next role discussed in this section is that of content editor, from an email interview with David Engelbrecht. The role of content editor involves working with copy to ensure it is web ready, populating the newspaper's landing pages with fresh content (see 4.4.1), aggregating stories and standing in as homepage editor (Engelbrecht, 2019). On weekends Engelbrecht also run the news desk in the absence of the news editor (Engelbrecht, 2019). Regarding the Schweizer-event, Engelbrecht as the content editor ensured that online articles were enriched with photographs, social media posts, as well as contained relevant links back to archived or related articles to increase Netwerk24's online traffic (Engelbrecht, 2019). Arguably, Engelbrecht would be responsible to make sure the version used in the newspapers of the Schweizer-event is published on Netwerk24 and linked to the landing pages as part of the online selection the newspapers have online.

The roles of the editor-in-chief, news editor, journalist, homepage editor, sub editor and content editor roles in Netwerk24 have been discussed above. Here follow the explanations of the role of typographical editor, rewriter and assistant newspaper editor.

Vernon Janse van Rensburg calls his role typographical editor and works as part of the senior editorial team at *Beeld*. He was involved in production of the articles about the Schweizer-event. He edited and rewrote articles for the place he prepared for it in *Beeld* (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Janse van Rensburg (2019) is of the opinion that his role changed because according to him, the newspapers receives lower quality stories. Ensuring high quality copy and layout in the newspaper, is part of Janse van Rensburg's role.

We cannot do and think like in the old days. You must give your readers a much better package than what you were used to do, because you competitors are more and different. This makes the newspapers' work more difficult. We have lower quality resources, lower quality articles presented to us, but we must do better with the lower quality given to us. In the digital first environment it is more important to newspapers to deliver higher quality. We must be the place where people can come for truthful, correct information. (Janse van Rensburg, 2019)

A rewriter in the national content team delivering copy to *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*, Annalize Dedekind, agreed to a face-to-face interview. The role as rewriter part of the national team was created when the newspaper journalists moved to writing for Netwerk24. The role of the national content team is to produce the international pages for the printed newspapers, to

help rewrite and wrap articles that appeared on Netwerk24 for the newspapers (Dedekind, 2019). Often Netwerk24 writes for example three articles about an event on a single day, when the newspaper will only use one article (Dedekind, 2019), as is seen in the Schweizer-event (see 5.2). “Then we wrap the three articles into one article. I rewrite articles, fix grammar mistakes, blend articles together, remove excess information, and write headlines,” (Dedekind, 2019). In this team one finds the news, two others start translating and subediting (Dedekind, 2019).

Assistant editor of *Volksblad*, called the *eindredakteur* in Afrikaans, Christo van Staden, agreed to an email interview. He fulfills the role of selecting news stories and articles for inclusion in *Volksblad*. Van Staden is also responsible for the presentation of the news through the organising and lay-out of stories and photographs to create the best paper possible for *Volksblad*’s target market.

In this section the major roles of news workers important to the flow of news at the publications has been dealt with.

5.5.2 The digital first strategy at the time of the Schweizer-event

5.5.2.1 History and structure of the digital first strategy

The digital first strategy used at Netwerk24 was implemented in April 2016 when all journalists working for *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* moved their reporting lines to Netwerk24 (Loubser, 2019b). Core teams remained at the newspapers. Since then, news gathering in business, art, sport and news are conducted according to the adapted digital first strategy for Netwerk24 (Loubser, 2019b).

If hints for news are viewed as immediate breaking news, it is prioritised as urgent and Netwerk24 works getting a preliminary story to break the news (Engelbrecht, 2019). Thereafter a more complete article is then written for the web and only then a summary of days’ articles on the news event is presented to the newspapers who repurpose the articles (Engelbrecht, 2019).

Loubser (2019b) explains Netwerk24 is not yet profitable but puts this in the context that most printed publications in Media24 were also not immediately profitable. Media24 supports Netwerk24 and the three printed newspapers pay a service fee to Netwerk24 for the copy delivered to them (Loubser, 2019). This helps Netwerk24 to cover costs, however, they are also generating their own income (Loubser, 2019) arguably from subscribers and advertising.

Although the newsrooms moved from the newspapers to Netwerk24, the news editor and most of the journalists in Bloemfontein used to work for *Volksblad* (Coetzee, 2019). Coetzee stresses this staff know the needs of the printed newspapers very well even though they are now working the larger Netwerk24 team (Coetzee, 2019). The three newspapers now have core editorial teams, for example *Volksblad* has only six editorial staff members who create the newspaper (Coetzee, 2019).

5.5.2.2 Why digital first and its advantages

Digital first entails that Netwerk24 is top priority in this process and therefore news copy needs to reach online first (Engelbrecht, 2019). To be successful in the transition from print to digital, Netwerk24 must work digital first. “If we want to be successful there no way, we cannot work digital first. We have to work fast, we must be able to break news, and we need a fresh offer throughout the day,” (Loubser, 2019b). The first article about the Schweizer-event was arguably published without the comment of the school (but indicating this clearly with comment of other official institutions) for Netwerk24 not to be behind on the story.

On a digital news website such as Netwerk24, readers must have the opportunity to follow articles all the time and therefore blogs are very popular (Loubser, 2019b), also arguably why various blog were seen in the content analysis.

The advantages of the digital first strategy is its speed that attracts readers (Smith, 2019). The digital first process enables Netwerk24 to really be first with news. “If you play fast and work fast then you can have the immediacy factor on your side” (Anon, 2019a). The aim is to produce fast, continuous news informing readers as the news is developing (Anon, 2019c). “We are differentiated from the others because we supply news copy to three daily newspapers. Therefore, Netwerk24 cannot only think of their own digital needs, but should keep in mind the needs of the newspapers to publish content that is still looking fresh,” (Anon, 2019c)

When Netwerk24 can be faster with Afrikaans content than their English competitors, it gives Netwerk24 a competitive advantage in the Afrikaans market (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

The pressure in the digital first process is immense as it keeps the publication up to date, every minute of every hour of every single day with any news happening in any neighbourhood, province or country in the world (Engelbrecht, 2019).

Digital first thus means the news are gathered with the aim to be published after being written, edited and enriched on the same day (Van Staden, 2019; Smith, 2019, Anon, 2019a).

The news is not kept waiting to be published in the newspaper the next day (Anon, 2019a, Coetzee, 2019). “Web is first, even though the newspapers are on street the next day. Only if a story is not very time bound, it is kept over for the following morning early. News is filed first on the web, especially breaking news, is immediately on the web,” (Anon, 2019a).

Breaking news can be published within minutes and other hard news in about half an hour (Smith, 2019). The digital first strategy includes the possibility of publishing a few sentences information for breaking news while the article can be developed (Dedekind, 2019), but it will be stated to readers that the news is breaking, and more facts will follow (Smith, 2019).

The immediacy factor in blogs fits in with the digital first strategy and was often used during the covering of the Schweizer-event (see 5.2). When deciding to start a blog about a certain event, some aspects are considered as it must be certain that enough information will be available to keep readers’ interest in the blog (Anon, 2019b).

You keep an eye on the news and see okay, this is now breaking. Then you decide what you will do about it, what are your resources, how many journalists are available, then you can decide how to cover it. (Anon, 2019b)

The digital first process was especially helpful in the case of the Schweizer-event because the live updates made it easy to get the news out (Anon, 2019b). “In blogs you only type the information and publish it. Then only the technical caching and then it is live. It does not go through the normal system,” (Anon, 2019b). Blogs satisfies the audience wanting to know what is happening as it is happening (Anon, 2019b).

It is also beneficial to the newspapers to whom the minute by minute news given in blogs helps to give a good, compact, complete version of the event (Coetzee, 2019).

5.5.2.3 Blogs and publishing

“People can feel as if they are in court, or on the scene, they can watch through the words in the blogs. If you call yourself a digital news website, you cannot only give people updates on the story,” Loubser (2019b) says.

Most blogs are run by a team consisting of a journalist in the field and the homepage editor or blogger in office (Loubser, 2019). The role of the journalist (as discussed in 5.1.1) is to send pieces of information very fast for the blog. A homepage editor can run a blog by themselves as well, if only posts with internet-based information is necessary, for example a

terrorist attack abroad. Blogs can also be done as a larger team, often a journalist, photographer, videographer and a blogger (Anon, 2019a).

The homepage editor and blogger are news workers with good news judgment and who writes with little mistakes because blogs are written in real time with no subs in the initial process (Loubser, 2019b). “Subeditors only see these articles when there is a break in the event the blog covers,” (Loubser, 2019b). The digital first process still entails validating information before publishing, even in a paced situation (Anon, 2019b).

Bloggers sometimes also fulfill the role of desk reporter (see 5.5.3) on big news events and should, if time permits, look wider to coverage of other sources, including on social media, especially eyewitnesses of big news events on Facebook and Twitter (Anon, 2019b). Facts, even in embedded social media posts should be verified (Anon, 2019b).

“It [blogs] gives a feeling of immediate news and the reader feels informed. The blogs are read well because people want to know what is happening. It can also make readers a part of the events rather than to wait for television or radio or the newspaper,” (Anon, 2019c).

Although blogs only keep readers informed of developing news and the minute by minute reporting does not mean much to the newspapers (Anon, 2019c), articles on the homepage must be updated continuously because “readers come back”, (Anon, 2019b). “We live in a me me me community. Everything is about if you make it difficult for the user to follow the path, then you lose them. You can see that in all the statistics,” (Anon, 2019b).

According to the participant the user’s journeys are different. “Our readers come in on cell phones, we can take two minutes when the news is published until the PN arrives at the reader,” (Anon, 2019b). Smart watches will soon be the first contact with the reader, instead of the smart phone PN which is currently the first contact (Anon, 2019b). This is important to the future of the digital first strategy because the user’s experience is important (Anon, 2019b). “Digital first you have to look at the way the readers follow because you have to look at how your reader is experiencing it,” (Anon, 2019b).

The content editor and homepage editor enrich news articles with photographs or social media posts, scan it again for any grammar or spelling errors and anything that could be factually wrong (Engelbrecht, 2019).

In exceptional cases homepage editors may keep articles overnight to give the morning team fresh and strong copy to start the day (Loubser, 2019b; see also 5.2.3 and 5.2.4). The reason for copy to be published a day after it has been produced, is that copy must be published on Netwerk24 constantly and therefore homepage editors are forced to keep a few stories overnight for the next early morning (Anon, 2019b). This is seen in the content analysis where an article about the Schweizer-event was published in the morning at 6:15.

Big and breaking news goes immediately on the web, the publication wants to break the story on the web (Anon, 2019a). Softer stories, such as human interest, is sometimes kept for the following morning because it is believed to be better read online (Anon, 2019a). If softer stories are published with big stories, they do not get as much attention (Anon, 2019a).

Copy that is published on the same day in print and online, is usually planned to be published on the same day because Netwerk24 thinks the story will be better read the next day (Anon, 2019c).

There are also other reasons, such as when the core newspaper teams sometimes produce an item especially for a newspaper, for example the features in *Volksblad* on Saturdays. This article is not published digital first and is rather seen grouped with the opinion pages and supplements (Coetzee, 2019). Other factors that can cause an article not to be published on the day it was written, is that a lack of man hours or a bottle neck of articles reaching the sub editor team should also be considered (Smith, 2019). Van Staden (2019) explains newsworthy stories not used in the newspaper has mostly to do with timing and space in the newspapers. It happens that a story breaks in time for the next day's paper, and is published on the web, but that there is simply not space in the paper to use it (Van Staden, 2019).

5.5.2.4 Disadvantages

There are no disadvantages in the digital first process itself, according to Loubser (2019b). However, Loubser (2019b) agrees that in this workflow there is not the same amount of time to train journalists as in the past printed era where a new journalist could work all day on a news article.

This is not necessarily a disadvantage; it causes that people are in deep water sooner and the talented ones thrive in these circumstances. It forces everyone to take more ownership for their own articles, forces the department heads to take more ownership of their divisions. (Loubser, 2019b)

Ownership should also be taken of mistakes. Smith (2019) explains sometimes a mistake happens although the team is working towards being as “fast, accurate and thorough as possible”. It is possible to sometimes lose the grip when your only concern is to be digital first and the disadvantages are in the detail (Smith, 2019), for example that “every single fact” cannot always be checked because of the pressure to be first with the news (Anon, 2019c). The

fast-paced breaking news environment's might cause mistakes and a loss of depth in news stories (Coetzee, 2019; Anon, 2019a, (Van Staden, 2019).

You cannot always verify everything immediately. It can be a small mistake like the spelling of a name or connect them to the wrong political party. I think sometimes depth is lost. Because things must happen very fast, you do not always have time to get comment, you can only do the basics. (Anon, 2019a)

According to Anon (2019b) much copy is produced and readers do not read all the copy. It is argued that readers had an overview of the day's news in print, but online readers read a smaller, and random, segment of news (Anon, 2019b).

They come in on a certain article that is written at a certain time and this could lead to readers thinking the news coverage is not evenly, that people would say things like 'why do you never write about farm murders?' But if you really look, we write about this a lot. That skews the picture a bit. This might lead to people not trusting you. I think people think we do not cover everything they were used to in the newspapers. The newspapers were your report of the previous day, giving a complete picture. Keeping record still happens as we are still connected to the newspapers, but readers does not always see this. (Anon, 2019b)

The disadvantages for the newspapers are a lack of quality of the copy received from Netwerk24 (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). "We have to put in a lot more effort in the stories we get from the web than we used to in the old days, when stories came to us directly," says Janse van Rensburg (2019).

The major disadvantage is that especially some of the breaking stories are written based on very basic information and often need some rectifying in the follow-ups as more information become available (Van Staden, 2019). Van Staden (2019) explains if the digital first strategy results in a lower circulation for the printed newspapers, it also puts Netwerk24 at risk, as it is partially funded by the newspapers (Van Staden, 2019).

5.5.2.5 Mediums are different

Although the mediums of the news media changed, the role of the media is still to inform, educate, entertain and to be the watchdog, mirror and glue of the community (Coetzee, 2019).

Loubser (2019b) names other advantages of the digital first strategy: that news workers can use videos and podcasts and Netwerk24 is broadcasting its first digital soap opera, *Die Testament*.

Journalists can produce more video, voice recordings or photographs to use with their text that might be slightly longer than a newspaper text (Anon, 2019a). There is not a limit on the length of online articles and journalists can write too long, because “people do not read that long articles,” says Anon (2019a).

Even as a digital journalist, the web is often overwhelming to this anonymous journalist because a user sees everything at once: “You do not know where to click or where to look first. The newspaper reads more easily, and it is more organised,” (Anon, 2019a). The participant struggles to find specific content on the website (Anon, 2019a).

Presentation has always been important in the news industry (Anon, 2019b).

How it is placed and the layout in a newspaper. Later the trend became to use subheadings, to make the copy easier for the reader to consume to keep the attention. Digital is not different, you have to get them to read the news and to keep their attention. (Anon, 2019b)

Two differences in the mediums is, that if mistakes are found in published articles, it can be fixed immediately and also that readers do not have a natural overview of the news anymore and therefore they cannot rate the news in context (Anon, 2019c; see 5.5.2.4). “The reader who does not search a bit further on a topic, can feel uninformed because all the important articles are not always on the homepage,” (Anon, 2019c). The participant points out that the difference between printed newspapers and the homepage is that many articles are published online and if a reader missed it, it was missed (Anon, 2019c).

Digital first changed mediums of the news, however, is convinced the core product – news – has not changed (Coetzee, 2019). Janse van Rensburg (2019) explains that after the online platform announced the news, the newspaper can do a follow up or background story – newspapers just do the news in a different way (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

However, this is also the major downside and one of the reasons why the printed papers have a very uncertain future: stories end up in the paper sometimes 24 hours after they were first published on Netwerk24 (Van Staden, 2019).

5.5.2.6 Newspapers' positives and negatives

As part of this strategy, the newspapers can decide which of the articles produced for Netwerk24 are used in print publications the next day (Loubser, 2019b). The newspapers source new copy for opinion pages and supplements such as *BY*, *Versnit* and *Motors* (Loubser, 2019b). All other copy is created with the intention of publishing the information first online before it is used in print (Loubser, 2019b).

As for the newspapers, Loubser (2019b) agrees they must compromise at times because of the digital first strategy. "They must spend more time to rewrite articles", (Loubser, 2019b). Netwerk24 news workers write many stories about the same news event during a day that the newspapers often need to rewrite into one article (Loubser, 2019b). However, when it makes sense to Netwerk24, their team will write a wrap or summary themselves towards the end of the day (Loubser, 2019b). According to Loubser (2019b) it only happens in extraordinary cases that Netwerk24 do not write their own wrap.

She views blogs as an advantage to newspapers as well because it provides the newspapers with more information to work with than what they might have had in the past. Printed newspapers can polish articles late in the afternoon or early in the evening (Smith, 2019). "You now have much news, now you can choose how you want to package it, you can add something and rewrite it. You can add more things, make it look better," (Smith, 2019).

Smith (2019) admits the disadvantage for newspapers is that your "news always tastes like cold pap in the morning". With this he explains the feeling that readers already saw the story on Netwerk24, already saw it on TV or already on other platforms (Smith, 2019). "I think they should adapt much stronger still. It is not if you have the news, but how you have it and how you present it," (Smith, 2019).

Newspapers cannot scoop other publications with news anymore, the news has already been on the website (Anon, 2019a). However, the newspapers should give depth to stories, but this might not always be practical because all the journalists now work for Netwerk24 (Anon, 2019a). Having depth in the newspapers, can be achieved by placing opinion articles in newspapers (Anon, 2019a).

Newspapers do not need to employ journalists anymore (Anon, 2019c). "They also receive all the news as it happens," (Anon, 2019c). This is however also the disadvantage: the newspapers staff sit with so much short pieces of articles when they put the newspaper together (Anon, 2019c). A team of rewriters are needed to make sense of all the information and to edit it to still be newsworthy in the next day's newspaper (Anon, 2019c).

Newspapers has a place in the market, and they know their readers wants to know more about a certain area (Anon, 2019c). This is lost in the digital first process and must then be added in the rewriting process (Anon, 2019c). “The typical local news is not produced anymore” (Anon, 2019c).

Newspapers have transitioned to the last port of call for news, but that they have the advantage of providing a compact but broader scope to readers who might have followed six articles online (Engelbrecht, 2019).

The newsroom does produce articles that are not local, but *Volksblad* choose from the articles (Coetzee, 2019). “We select and combine and repackage in our constrained space for the next day from the selection they produced,” (Coetzee, 2019).

Value and depth and width can be added to articles in the newspapers (Coetzee, 2019). Newspapers have no fresh, exclusive, new news (Coetzee, 2019). “I think we manage this as far as we can with the national content team,” (Coetzee, 2019). This team take copy from Netwerk24 and rewrite it adding depth and gravitas for the newspapers to create a better all-round picture the next day (Coetzee, 2019).

There was no discussion about whether not to carry the first article about the Schweizer-event (Coetzee, 2019). “I am guessing if I say possibly the story broke late and was not on the news list. Might have been listed hiding, cannot remember if it was on the news conferences,” (Coetzee, 2019).

Volksblad used the story thereafter very boldly, three times on the front page – even more than *Beeld*, who traditionally serves that geographical area (Coetzee, 2019). Coetzee says *Volksblad* had a different stance to the article after *Beeld* published an opinion piece about what happened. Smith, who was previously the news editor for *Volksblad*, then also wrote an opinion article about the event (Coetzee, 2019).

Newspapers must find a way to package the news so that people will still want to read about it the next day, but does not always have new information (Dedekind, 2019). Having the Netwerk24 copy is an advantage because the newspapers can repackage the information (Dedekind, 2019).

Van Staden (2019) explains all these articles are kept marked in a file where the newspaper production teams have access to them (Van Staden, 2019). These teams select from the file and rewrite some for the newspaper (Van Staden, 2019).

Assistant editor Van Staden (2019) selects articles for *Volksblad* from the produced articles. The articles must be newsworthy and relevant to *Volksblad* readers (Van Staden, 2019). A copy of the article is sent to *Volksblad*’s file, which is adapted to fit their market, for

instance by placing more emphasis on the location in their distribution area or other elements of the story (Van Staden, 2019).

The benefit of the digital first strategy for print is that a better, more concise and condensed version is published in the paper (Van Staden, 2019). It is probably a benefit for the web publication's readers that they have numerous stories on the same event to read (Van Staden, 2019).

In *Volksblad* space is very constrained and according to Coetzee (2019) the newspaper sometimes does not even carry 50% of the produced copy. This shows the news selection process in *Volksblad*: for example with the Van Breda-murder, Spier murder, Twizza murder and Life Esidimeni, *Volksblad* takes note of the cases while they are in the process, but only on the day verdict is given in court, will it be on the front page (Coetzee, 2019).

5.5.3 Desk reporters

Desk reporters do a shift in the office from early in the morning until 23:00 in the evening, also covering weekends (Loubser, 2019b). The journalist on this shift do not actually go into the field to gather news, they write from their desks, gathering facts from the internet or via telephone, or wire translations, or aggregate stories from multiple internet sources (Loubser, 2019b, Anon, 2019a).

Journalists write stories from different areas, especially when they are on a desk shift (Loubser, 2019b; Coetzee, 2019; Van Staden, 2019). The desk reporters handle breaking news reporters cannot get to immediately, thus, desk reporters are the first to reach a story if it breaks (Anon, 2019c; Engelbrecht, 2019). This reporter finds out enough information to determine if the story is major breaking news or an evolving story and must be well informed to keep an eye on news sources (Engelbrecht, 2019; Anon, 2019c). The desk reporter writes fast and accurate for the homepage editor to break the story and to have a lead on competitors (Engelbrecht, 2019).

But if a journalist works on a national article on a subject like farm murders, the journalist might cover all the farm murders on that day, however, on the regular shift, chances are 80% that journalists will do an article in the area they are based (Smith, 2019).

When the reporters started working desk reporter shifts, since the last changes in the structure of the newsrooms, journalists had to adapt (Smith, 2019). Journalists were used to roughly working from 8:00 until 17:00, but Netwerk24 now has a team coming at 5:00 in the morning who handles the breaking, international news and translations to keep Netwerk24 as complete as possible (Smith, 2019). Two desk reporters work from 14:00 until 22:00 and cover

bigger stories after other journalists has left the office, do translations and aggregations from around the world – especially when few people are on duty (Smith, 2019; Anon, 2019c). Netwerk24 needs to publish news most hours of the day and the beat of desk reporter was created to generate fresh news almost all the time (Coetzee, 2019). Desk reporters are there to keep the news flow going on times and days when there is low density of news (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). A desk reporter in Cape Town can for example do a story about an event in Johannesburg, it's just to keep the news flow going and keep up to date with the news (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Desk reporters are the foot soldiers who need to feed the “monster”, the news website, continuously with stories (Van Staden, 2019).

The journalists in the newsroom in Bloemfontein function as a team, but are also part of a larger national team (Smith, 2019). Smith (2019) explains news workers help each other with research, going out and writing, or support, also when planning how stories are done.

If one makes an error, a team member will notice and you can ask for help, however, Janse van Rensburg (2019) feels news workers are prone to become less of a team over time. According to Janse van Rensburg (2019) the journalists and the production teams used to be teams that interacted with each other and currently the team of journalists only worry about the web and the newspaper team only cares about the newspaper.

The role of a desk reporter is to write breaking news as fast as possible to publish on the web, even if it is short before as this article is followed up later by another journalist with a more comprehensive article (Anon, 2019a; Anon, 2019c). On weekends, the desk reporter is often the only journalist on duty at the time (Anon, 2019a). If time allows the desk reporter can write a bit more in depth, but the goal is to get the news out as fast and accurate as possible (Anon, 2019a). The desk reporter verifies facts, but not be on mission to find people (Anon, 2019a). Desk reporters often work with emergency services, the police and other traditional resources (Anon, 2019b).

The blogger on a blog about the Schweizer-event during the sample period for this study, was in a situation when a politician posted the name of the teacher who posted the photograph (Anon, 2019b). This researcher argues that the roles of the blogger and the desk reporter is fluid in this case. The blogger found the name of the teacher of the class and was then left with a decision to identify the class teacher, and or to repeat the identification of the politician (Anon, 2019b). Later it became clear the teacher who took the photograph was not the class teacher (Anon, 2019b). This situation shows the importance of verifying facts, even in the fast-paced blogging capacity (Anon, 2019b). It is important for a desk reporter and blogger to be sure of all the facts because information spreads fast on social media (Anon, 2019b).

This researcher argues that the role of desk reporters is still expanding to eventually become the responsibility of not only the news workers on the desk reporter shift (see 2.2). Bloggers, journalists and other news workers each has elements of this role interwoven to their daily tasks – including verifying facts or finding photographs on social media.

This researcher finds teams are still as prevalent in newsrooms as decades ago, however, the roles in the teams are different. The news workers now require different skills while roles assigned to individuals, have become more liquid.

5.5.4 Audience clicks versus news values

According to Loubser (2019b) Netwerk24 never do stories only because they might get many clicks. Netwerk24 serve the newspapers and because Netwerk24 must write quality stories that are good enough that people will be willing to pay for it (Loubser, 2019b). Loubser (2019b) exclaims that traditional values that were important in news teams are still valid.

According to Anon (2019b) the articles about the Schweizer-event were read well online and had high news values. This participant argues analytics is an opportunity to know what people are reading (Anon, 2019b) and that it is good, because journalists might put in much effort into stories that is not read (Anon, 2019a). It could skew judgment when journalists ponder if readers will click on a story when they decide to cover it (Anon, 2019a). According to this journalist municipal articles is hard work, often has high news values but are often not well read (Anon, 2019a).

Choosing a balance between stories with gravitas and popular stories attracting attention has always been debated in the newsroom (Van Staden, 2019), because celebrity-, entertainment- and gossip stories has always been written and get clicks (Anon, 2019b). Another anonymous participant agrees, arguing that journalists should accept that readers like to read stories about celebrities and tragedies, as many stories are newsworthy and are typical stories that would have been written for newspapers (Anon, 2019a). The anonymous journalist is of the opinion journalists should write stories people read and the stories should have news value (Anon, 2019a).

Balancing between news values and clicks is difficult, because clicks mean more traffic on the website, but readers complain in the comment section if they feel the headline was misleading (Engelbrecht, 2019). Engelbrecht (2019) argues readers do not complain when adhering to traditional news values, but that the article might get less clicks. His solution is that if the article is sensitive, he keeps the headline neutral and do not PN the article, however if it's in public interest, he will make the headline more orientated towards clicks (Engelbrecht,

2019). Engelbrecht (2019) says this depends on the editor who's on duty as their values translate to the decision made.

Janse van Rensburg (2019) argues that newspaper readers are different from the web readers in that even if the exact same person reads both mediums, they expect different things. For example, when the photographs of Reeve Steenkamp's body were released in the media, everyone saw it on the web, but it was something that could not be used in the newspaper, as the newspaper reader will not tolerate it (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). There is little influence, but this gap will never be closed because web wants immediate articles and newspapers more depth (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

The anonymous journalist still finds traditional news values important and combines it with what receives clicks because stories with news values is read well online (Anon, 2019a). The participant feels there is "sometimes too much emphasis on how many clicks a story gets, although I understand why" (Anon, 2019a). This journalist does not enjoy writing stories with low news value (Anon, 2019a).

Volksblad does not proactively try to have a balance as the editor only sees what received clicks in the following days newspaper, therefore *Volksblad* does not use statistics as a news value (Coetzee, 2019). Coetzee (2019) says news workers do not have a physical list of news values stories are compared to. Sometimes the stories which are the most read on Netwerk24 is also the front-page main article, but not necessarily (Coetzee, 2019). Local news is prioritised at *Volksblad*, for example a series of articles remembering a local shooting two decades ago (Coetzee, 2019). Coetzee (2019) guess it did not have many clicks but was on the front page. Coetzee (2019) explains with big news such as the Schweizer-event will make their way to the front page without measuring clicks. The amount of clicks the Schweizer-articles got on Netwerk24 did not play a role when the decision was taken to carry the Schweizer-event on the front page multiple times. The story was later not seen as racism, but it was also a mirror of people who were tired of the race card and racism. "Our take on it was on target," (Coetzee, 2019).

Balancing stories receiving many clicks with traditional news values is a problem, because newspaper readers are not necessarily interested in the same news as the web readers (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Thus, if the web teams are too focused on the click's stories get, then the newspaper receives weaker stories (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). This gap between web and newspapers is a problem – but it is a problem that will never be solved, because the two mediums differ (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

Beeld try not to let what get attention on the web, affect news decisions (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). "But I have to grim, because sometimes it does have an effect,

unfortunately,” (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Van Staden (2019) argues the typical stories not used in *Volksblad* which seem to be popular on the web, are about Steve Hofmeyr and Karlien van Jaarsveld, as these stories “do not have importance and relevance to South Africa today” (Van Staden, 2019).

This researcher argues tension exist between audience clicks online and traditional news values (2.4). This researcher argues news professionals are hesitant to accept deliberate influence of statistics on the final copy, especially in newspapers. Studies examined in 2.4 finds reasons including the traditional aim for independence as well as the negative view of clickbait for legacy media’s caution to embrace the influence of clicks.

The Schweizer-event carried on the front pages, had high news value (see 3.5; 5.3) and is also among the most read events for Netwerk24 in 2019 (Anon, 2019b; see 5.5.4). It was carried on the front pages and had blogs running on multiple occasions (Appendix B).

The literature suggests clicks are used for story selection and placement on the homepage or in newspapers (see 2.4). From the interviews this researcher concludes this might sometimes be the case for Netwerk24, but not in the newspapers (see 5.4.4).

This researcher argues the newspaper workers are of the view that clicks online have little effect on news placement and selection, and this was a valid opinion regarding the reporting during the Schweizer-event.

5.5.5 Technology and social media

Technology and social media are used for both marketing of the publications, their content and internal news processes including news gathering. In the Schweizer-event, the photograph that received the media’s attention, was a news hint on Twitter.

LinkedIn, newsletters, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are all used in the social media strategy (Loubser, 2019b). The Netwerk24 social media team and the newspapers are both involved in the day-to-day operation of the integrated social media strategy (Loubser, 2019b). Newsletters are created with Everlytic and Google Analytics are used to track statistics for the website (Engelbrecht, 2019). Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are great for journalists to market their stories (Anon, 2019a). All these marketing means were also used in the case of the Schweizer-event.

News gathering in the digital age changed to now include social media and technology (Smith, 2019). Journalists’ gear is still a notebook and a pen, but needing a camera, cell phone and digital recorder changed to only the smart phone (Smith, 2019). Journalists can record voices, audio and video, which helps writing the written story having the text, video,

photographs and recording all in one device (Smith, 2019). Journalists must think faster at news scenes and produce the story faster (Smith, 2019).

Journalists use WhatsApp communicating with sources and colleagues to gather facts and photographs (Anon, 2019a), which was also true in reporting on the Schweizer-event. In the digital world journalists have access to anyone in the country via WhatsApp and phone calls et cetera and can reach information quicker (Engelbrecht, 2019). The anonymous journalist says it is easy to contact people on Facebook their contact numbers are unavailable (Anon, 2019a).

Dedekind (2019) uses Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media to get information and Van Staden (2019) agrees social media helps to find photographs for news. Journalists can find information about people for stories and a Twitter account like Donald Trump's gives many story ideas (Dedekind, 2019). Journalists follow people and institutions on social media, and often get hints for stories from expected as well as unexpected sources (Van Staden, 2019).

Newspapers often rely on social media for comments on happenings, for instance when people have died tragically, to get responses and reactions from people who have known them (Van Staden, 2019).

Furthermore, social media could be used in a wider sense to help in the journalistic task, for instance, questions can be posted on the newspaper's Facebook page to gather more information on a news incident (Van Staden, 2019). Social media has become an integrated part of the workflow and operations (Van Staden, 2019).

Interview questions about social media and technology did not provide complete pictures of just how integrated it is to the workflow (see 2.6). This researcher argues news workers are very used to these resources, in so far that it is taken for granted and therefore difficult to identify in their day to day work.

5.5.6 Gatekeeping

This environment still has and needs gatekeepers, not only gate checkers (Loubser, 2019). News workers at Netwerk24 and the printed newspapers publish quality articles by ensuring the information are accurate and credible, explains Loubser (2019). This is ensured in that the copy pass various gatekeepers before publishing: a news editor, subeditors and a homepage editor (Loubser, 2019). Checking information received on social media is important, sometimes to counter inaccurate rumors distributed (Anon, 2019a).

According to Loubser (2019), gatekeepers help people understand all the information they are confronted with. The anonymous journalist agrees, as journalists and news editors still get hints for stories from the public from which they must choose what to cover and what not (Anon, 2019a). Especially because information is so available, it is the media's choice to decide on what to focus and different media houses will take different decisions (Anon, 2019a). Gatekeepers in the media has the role to verify information, to be selective and to tell readers what is important and what is less important (Anon, 2019a).

According to Coetzee (2019), there is still an absolute line between the editor of *Volksblad* and the team where gatekeeping takes place, and, they will not carry anything if it is not verified. The newspaper still has the right to publish articles or not, thus the same checks and balances is still valid (Coetzee, 2019).

Other participants have the view that gate checkers are relevant as a news publication cannot control information anymore, because they are just one competitor in a larger market (Anon, 2019b) and currently news workers “try to manage especially against fake news” (Anon, 2019c). Information cannot be contained and controlled like before (Van Staden, 2019). On Facebook all the posts of the news companies and unprofessional blogs, has the same font and format for photographs (Anon, 2019b). News publications must adapt as they are not gatekeepers anymore, and the participant explains that before the digital disruption, the senior editorial staff would have a meeting to decide what the news for the day is and what news readers will know about (Anon, 2019b). In the current information age, a publication cannot decide not to “make something news”, because if one publication does not report on it, another will (Anon, 2019b). This researcher argues a possible reason for the newspapers not to have published the first article (see 5.2.1) might have been not to “make it news”, however, the storm on social media continued anyway.

The view held by Dedekind (2019) that the role of gate checkers is fulfilled, because information is available on many platforms from many sources fits the argument above. After all facts were checked, the newspapers did publish the articles (see 5.2.1).

Dedekind (2019) explains some information seems valid, but after checking, it is clearly fake and therefore news workers must be sure they use reliable sources. This reasoning is apparent in the example of the Schweizer-event. The news got bigger because of the fuss about it (Smith, 2019). Then the DA got involve and then everyone wanted to boycott, fire, hire and burn, and that made the story bigger (Smith, 2019).

Smith (2019) explains that if a photograph as the one in the Schweizer-event is sent to a journalist, the journalist should first ask what is this? (Smith, 2019). Comment is needed from the school, the department and other role players that emerge to have the context of the

photograph, otherwise it cannot be reported on (Smith, 2019). In the case of the Schweizer event the uproar in South Africa gave context for the articles, especially after the EFF and DA marked the event as racism (Smith, 2019). That became the news, and when it was clear not to be racism, the background of the event was all wrong (Smith, 2019). Smith says the first people who jumped on the racism bandwagon, was wrong and that caused damage to the country and political parties (Smith, 2019).

This researcher argues that unlike literature discussed in the literature review suggests gatekeeping has been replaced by gate checkers, both ideas are valid. Better gatekeepers and more validating of information might have changed how the event played out in South Africa.

Unlikely gatekeepers and gate checkers are found throughout the workflow process, from the first news hints until articles are eventually published online and in printed newspapers. This researcher could not find evidence that news workers are aware of the gatekeeping role by Silicon Valley from the data collected in the interviews (see 2.2; 3.4).

5.5.7 Repurposing of content

The newspapers repurpose Netwerk24-content by either combining various articles to a summary of the events of the day or by editing single articles (Loubser, 2019b). A summary is sent from the newspapers back to Netwerk24 who publishes it and this contribution strengthens the online offer (Loubser, 2019b). According to Loubser (2019) the newspapers can focus to fulfill the role of producing a quality summary of the day and not worry about news gathering and related processes.

Not all articles online and in the newspapers are different versions (Loubser, 2019b; Smith, 2019). The version in the printed newspaper only differ when facts needs to be written fresher or if a wrap is written by the central team of rewriters (Loubser, 2019b; Smith, 2019; Engelbrecht, 2019; Van Staden, 2019). According to Smith (2019) the first article is used as it is on Netwerk24 in most cases, and then newspapers get various versions where they can add more photographs, graphics and information. Sometimes it is rewritten and repackaged or a new version might be written if new facts are available (Smith, 2019). This team of rewriters let newspapers look, feel, smell and taste different than the digital by making the articles more complete by blending various versions of the articles, and makes it look better on a page with a different headline or graphics (Smith, 2019). The rewriters put the information in blogs together, use the best angle for the story and package the story for the newspapers (Smith, 2019). This version is also sent back to Netwerk24 so that both platforms has the advantage of the wrap (Smith, 2019).

This was seen in many of the articles about the Schweizer-event seen in the newspapers, where multiple articles were carried online and a summary thereof in print (see 5.2). While blogs are running, they keep the reader engaged, but if a reader do not follow in real time, it is difficult to read, argues Anon (2019b).

Other reasons articles differ between print and online is because the article must be fitted to a constrained space in the newspaper and blogs must become news article (Anon, 2019a). The wrap is also published on the web (Anon, 2019a). Some journalists write wraps themselves, while other stories are written to a wrap by the newspapers (Anon, 2019a). Sometimes the newspapers will combine articles to form a summarizing story, because they want the latest angles or angles that differ from the web (Anon, 2019a). Sometimes the rewrites blend only one journalists' stories, but facts from wires such as News24 or articles from other journalists can be added (Anon, 2019a, Dedekind, 2019).

Possible reasons why the first Schweizer article was not in print, is because either the first breaking story was too late for the newspapers, or the newspaper did not think it was very serious at the time (Anon, 2019a). According to Engelbrecht (2019) the newspapers were sensitive to hold back with the Schweizer-event until more concrete facts were available. Engelbrecht (2019) guesses the newspapers did not want to cause more harm than good if they led with the story too quickly. On the Thursday a team visited the scene and it became a big story and was carried on the front pages (Anon, 2019a).

In repurposing the online content in the printed newspaper, it gives the newspaper an opportunity to reposition itself and there are internationally newspapers even increasing circulation in this way (Anon, 2019b). It is possible, because websites do not give the overall picture (Anon, 2019b). The newspaper can give a complete picture and a summary of what a reader should know (Anon, 2019b). This participant is of the opinion that the newspapers in the group does not do this, that they are not renewing and that the problem is rather with the readers (Anon, 2019b). According to this participant, the newspapers cannot experiment with changes for a younger market, as it might alienate the largest part of the current market (Anon, 2019b).

Differences in the print and online articles are mainly the references to time and different headlines (Anon, 2019b). Often it is necessary to blend various articles together in one encompassing article with the relevant context (Anon, 2019c). The articles are rewritten or edited to be relevant to the geographical area where the newspaper is distributed and the style of the newspaper (Anon, 2019c). The articles are rewritten by rewriters at the newspapers, but not all articles are rewritten (Anon, 2019c).

The articles are published online, and the newspaper reaches readers the next morning, which means the news workers must ensure that this copy differs in a way that the news is still fresh and new (Engelbrecht, 2019).

References to time is changed to let readers have a feeling that the news is new and angles are changed to ensure the newest possible facts for the newspapers (Engelbrecht, 2019). Articles might be kept for the next day when the article is slower news and doesn't heavily lean on something unfolding within a time frame (Engelbrecht, 2019). Repurposing does not affect print and online because the publications are in full symbiosis and both help each other, for example that print can condense an entire event into one article, whilst online must publish a blog that has to update consciously (Engelbrecht, 2019).

If a blog has a lot of information, but the newspaper only has space for 500 words, there is a rewriter that will blend facts together and give a different angle (Coetzee, 2019). During the rewriting process, mostly for the front page and the national political news on page two, the articles are shortened and might get a new angle (Coetzee, 2019).

News processes stayed mostly the same, except with less people and less capacity (Coetzee, 2019). The three newspapers duplicate some pages in the newspapers between the publications, have one central sub editor team and the national content team who rewrites the copy for print (Coetzee, 2019). This organisational structure prevents two people from doing the same work and it save everyone time and money (Coetzee, 2019). Usually page two, the international pages and the opinion pages shares much copy (Coetzee, 2019).

Newspapers can make changes to stamp their own authenticity (Coetzee, 2019). For sport, business and art there are national teams who provide this copy to the newspapers (Coetzee, 2019). *Volksblad* has a local free-lance art journalist (Coetzee, 2019). The sport editorial teams create local content on request (Coetzee, 2019).

The newspaper team receive news stories from the web after it is published online (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The team take the stories, check them, and see what in the story can be rewritten, repurposed, reedited, or re-angled to improve it and make it more relevant for newspaper readers for the next day (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The internet readers often expect immediacy, where as your newspaper readers expect quality (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Online and print articles are different because they should be different (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Online articles are written with immediacy in mind, in the moment of the event (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The web stories are often also weaker written, formulated, has incomplete information, which is partially excusable because of their pressure to get the story out as fast as possible (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). However, the web version cannot be the same in print, because the reader expects more of you (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). For

example, a web story can say a minister will have a speech about a theme. *Beeld* cannot write the next day a minister had a speech about this theme, because the reader wants to know what happened in the speech, what they should do with this information (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

On the newspaper side the copy selectors and rewriters change the copy (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The new version the newspapers produce, is often sent back to the web and used, showing good collaboration (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Articles are only rewritten and changed to give more and better information in a better angle (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The newspapers sometimes contact the journalist, asking for explanations or more information on an article, even though the newspapers also source information from social media and wires to improve the articles (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

All the articles are not rewritten, because not all articles need extra work and there are not enough resources to rewrite every story (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The newspapers choose the important stories to give more attention to (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

According to Janse van Rensburg, the stories from ex-newspaper journalists are also the ones that need the least rewriting (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). Their stories are better formulated, has a better structure, has all the needed information, has better intro's and is general of a higher standard as the new digital journalists (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). This researcher argues that this might be because older news workers who used to work in print will have more experience, but could also be connected to Loubser (2019b) explaining new journalists have less time to learn how to write (see 5.5.2.4).

The repurposing of content does not worry the online publications as much as it should (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). In print there is more awareness where the publication is going with a story, which is not the case online (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

Janse van Rensburg (2019) explains the first article of the Schweizer-event was not of a high standard and the newspaper did not get a complete picture of the extent of the story, it seemed to be a "small storm on social media". When things developed and after Netwerk24 gave more resources and thought to the story, when it was written well, the newspapers were interested and used the story on the front pages (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

Blogs and multiple stories keep the news flow online going and it suits the expectations of the online reader who wants immediacy, engagement and interest (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The wrap in the newspapers is good for their readers because it is a good summary of the day's events without going into too much detail and repeating information (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). The newspaper wrap is often again published online, showing the advantage for both mediums (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

Print and online articles do not necessarily differ (Dedekind, 2019). The online articles are often much longer, which is not practical for print and is therefore shortened to contain the most necessary information while the online articles can be longer (Dedekind, 2019). The articles are rewritten by the national content team who are all senior employees (Dedekind, 2019). Things that are changed, are intro's, if they are not written logically, if they are too long, if a story should rather be two separate stories, change factual errors or if the news has changed since it was written (Dedekind, 2019). Articles that are well written, are not changed (Dedekind, 2019).

Usually the national content team only work with content created during the day, but on the international page new copy is sometimes written and can by mistake be published first in print (Dedekind, 2019). The team does not have journalists and do not gather news but send enquiries to journalists or do translations from the wires, because much of the Netwerk24 international news is not always complete (Dedekind, 2019). According to Dedekind (2019) many stories on Netwerk24 are too long for newspapers, but their international news is short.

Volksblad rewrites stories to make them more suitable for the local readers by emphasising the local angles while several stories are wrapped for effective news presentation (Van Staden, 2019). Less important stories are not rewritten, except for obvious changes regarding time references (Van Staden, 2019). The style of our dailies is to rather refer to yesterday, today and tomorrow, whilst Netwerk24 refers to the day in question: Sunday or Monday (Van Staden, 2019). It makes sense to repurpose existing content and present it in a fresh and innovative way (Van Staden, 2019).

5.5.8 News gathering

News gathering starts when news workers receives hints and story ideas from the many contact areas amongst sources and communities, and in the case of Schweizer, the bespoken photograph was shared on social media from where it made its way to the newsroom.

Janse van Rensburg (2019) explains that journalists are sent out to gather stories which they write for publication on the web. The article goes through an editing process at Netwerk24 prior to being published from where it reaches the newspaper teams who edits further to repurpose for print (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

However, very few original stories are written currently, compared to the era before the internet, because there is no money to work for days on just one article (Anon, 2019c). "Reporters must also do much more than journalists before them – they are not only gathering and editing news, they must also be photographers and videographers," (Anon, 2019c).

In the news gathering process it is important to function in teams, for example when a journalist, a videographer and a photographer cover a news event together (Smith, 2019). In many cases it is practically difficult for the photographer or the journalist to also record video (Smith, 2019). With big news a videographer is added to the team (Smith, 2019).

Young journalists do about four articles per day, because the job demands it (Anon, 2019c). According to anonymous sub editor, in the days before digital news and before newspapers had massive financial pressure, reporters had time to go out, to chat to sources and get many good stories in that way (Anon, 2019c). “The journalists had beats and protected it as gold. The reporter did not want a rival journalist at another newspaper on the same beat to scoop you. Continuous contact with sources were more important than a smaller article on the day,” (Anon, 2019c). Newspapers also only have a certain amount of space and only the best copy was chosen to be published (Anon, 2019c). However, according to the anonymous sub editor, almost every word that is written is published today – regardless of the news value or the quality thereof (Anon, 2019c).

Newspapers do not have journalists in service, however, the newspapers are generally welcome to give input to Netwerk24 regarding their needs and expectations on news articles (Loubser, 2019b). In this regard there is very good collaboration between Netwerk24 and the newspapers because the editors of the newspapers and the Netwerk24 news editors have open communication lines to each other for requests to the newsroom (Loubser, 2019b).

Operations for planned and unplanned news are different, because the news workers can decide in advance who will do what, which is not possible with unplanned news (Loubser, 2019b). With breaking, unplanned news, WhatsApp groups are created to be a central place for all the information, accessible to everyone who needs it in the team (Loubser, 2019b), which was arguably the case in Schweizer.

The news team is smaller than in the era of the printed newspapers, as is the case around the world which impacts the final copy, however not meaning lower quality (Loubser, 2019b). News workers must prioritize which stories they do and which not (Loubser, 2019b). Most digital publications are inclined to produce too much articles because there is not a constraint to the space available for publication, as was the case in print (Loubser, 2019b). The constraints of the printed paper gave a natural constrain to the number of articles published, which is not the case in digital (Loubser, 2019b). Internationally websites are investigating if they might be producing too much copy and which stories they should rather not do (Loubser, 2019b). Netwerk24 is also busy with such an investigation (Loubser, 2019b). The stories decided not to pursue, will never be stories in public interest with high news values, Loubser says (2019b).

Loubser (2019b) is thankful that Netwerk24 is in an ecosystem with the three newspapers, as it empowers Netwerk24 to still be bound to the traditional-on-the-ground journalism. According to Loubser (2019b) this differentiates Netwerk24 from other news websites that are dependent on mostly desk reporting or aggregated news. “Our journalists still go out to news scenes which helps us to have a unique news offer in Afrikaans” (Loubser, 2019b). News routines changed as news workers now publish from minute to minute (Loubser, 2019b). There are not two or three deadlines a day, Loubser (2019b) underlines.

In the new digital environment, journalist helps with the news gathering process even in areas where they do not generally work (Smith, 2019). Smith (2019) explains he was involved in the news gathering process in the case of the Schweizer-event even though it was not in his area. Smith had a source the day the stories were breaking around the teacher (Smith, 2019). Smith did a story the same day after speaking to the source, writing the angle that the event did not happen in the teacher, who took the photographs (Smith, 2019).

He also did an opinion article that week stating that the DA will suffer during the election, which happened months later, “because of their deeds that day”, Smith says (2019). In the area in North West around Schweizer-Reneke, the DA is still losing votes to the VF+ (Smith, 2019).

Beats is not as fixed as before when newspapers had large teams and journalists had specific beats such as crime, court, agriculture, education, university, technical university, also softer beats (Smith, 2019). In the current digital transition publications have one, two or three people who focus on certain things, such as politics, because they are experienced (Smith, 2019). For certain beats the journalist must have good sources, a journalist cannot jump between politics and court as the journalist will be in court for eight hours and not have time to know what is happening elsewhere (Smith, 2019). Many journalists do crime; however, the other beats are not fixed (Smith, 2019). Beats is not a bad thing, but journalists now get more opportunities to do more things (Smith, 2019).

Smith (2019) manages a newsroom that can have on some days as few as only two journalists who must do ten articles, but the opposite also happens when there are not enough story ideas. In such a small newsroom there will be no beats (Smith, 2019). The news editor can change which journalist does what, knowing who is experienced in a beat, to have the story faster. Capacity and who can do what, is more important (Smith, 2019).

The news starts flowing when the news editor must know who will do which stories in what way before the first news conference at 8:00 (Smith, 2019). Thereafter the journalists will either gather the information by travelling to a scene or via telephone from their desk (Smith, 2019). Breaking stories, such as a bombing, is filed quickly via WhatsApp to the homepage

editor who put the story in the system with photographs (Smith, 2019). For big news another follow up is then filed from the scene in an email which a homepage editor will direct in the system (Smith, 2019). Regular news is written and filed in Eidos with photographs and directions for video or other embeds (Smith, 2019). During the news process, copy is sub edited and the homepage editor or the content editor enriches it (Smith, 2019).

The final copy is influenced by the small newsrooms because for example, investigative journalism is happening outside working hours (Smith, 2019). The Ton Vosloo-scheme, to fund investigative journalism, is not yet functioning, but might bring relief in this regard (Smith, 2019). The newsrooms also produce less stories per day than before, because of less people, but also not to overload Netwerk24 readers (Smith, 2019).

A journalist gets story ideas from a social media platform or from a police statement and decide with the news editor which story to pursue (Anon, 2019a). Journalists working in smaller outside offices sometimes must decide themselves which news to cover (Anon, 2019a). Journalists must decide how much time they will spend on a story, for example in the Schweizer-event none of the publications has a local journalist (Anon, 2019a). Traveling time has to be counted in, but will only be done on days with high news value news (Anon, 2019a). Sometimes a journalist will not be able to drive to a scene and must do the articles then via telephone (Anon, 2019a).

In the event of Schweizer the journalist and where applicable other members of the team, file their information for the blog via WhatsApp or email (Anon, 2019a).

The roles of the media are much the same, it is still the watchdog, to entertainment and to inform, but they are applied differently (Anon, 2019a).

The weight on in depth analysis inside a news story is now less than before because of the time constraints of the web (Anon, 2019a). On days where the journalists do not have many stories, they can add depth, but this is not the case usually (Anon, 2019a). Mostly article has the accuracy, but not always the depth, therefore some of the quality is lost (Anon, 2019a).

The structures of newsrooms at *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* changed, but in many ways smaller newsrooms at for example community newspapers has always functioned in much the same way (Anon, 2019a). The larger newspapers used to have teams of photographers, now journalists usually take their own photographs, like smaller newspapers has always done (Anon, 2019a). The journalists in these newsrooms now has limited access to photographers, however on big news events a photographer and videographer will be with the journalist (Anon, 2019a).

The days when the Netwerk24 news workers visited the Schweizer-event, is stressful for the editorial team, because of the travel time, and the aggressive community around the

school (Anon, 2019a). The topic of the event is also stressful, all before getting the information, video, photographs and filing (Anon, 2019a).

If news workers know about an event, they can plan to drive or decide to cover the event telephonically, which information is needed and the questions can be sent to a source beforehand (Anon, 2019a). With unplanned events, decisions are made much faster (Anon, 2019a).

Newsrooms always do what is possible, and with more people, more would be done, however the newsrooms do more than they can (Anon, 2019b)

Planned articles have more flesh and a sense of direction to them (Engelbrecht, 2019). Unplanned blogs can “take a life of their own” which can confuse readers (Engelbrecht, 2019).

Newspaper editors are involved with articles through various interaction and exchange of information with the news editor, the news list and the two news conferences (Coetzee, 2019).

In blogs reporters publish what is happening, but not much interpretation or investigating (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

Also, for newspapers the handling of planned and unplanned articles are very different (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). For events such as the opening of parliament, sources are organised to give interpretation and photographs can be sourced in advance (Janse van Rensburg, 2019). When unplanned news is breaking, news workers usually do not know what to expect and they will do the best they can (Janse van Rensburg, 2019).

The cost of production has an influence to the extent that journalists cannot drive too often or too far or sleep over to cover events (Dedekind, 2019). The publications in the group work together sending one journalist and the copy will be shared (Dedekind, 2019). News are gathered differently and presented different (Dedekind, 2019). Dedekind (2019) says the newspapers have a larger focus on crime and poverty where in the past it focused more only on politics or other kinds of stories. She attributes this to the news proposed in the news conferences that are more violent (Dedekind, 2019).

News routines also changed, as the reporters were used to working certain hours, now also including shifts covering a total of 18 hours per day (Dedekind, 2019). In the newspaper sub office hours did not change as much as the deadlines are the same, but the national content team’s hours did also change to include shifts (Dedekind, 2019). Blogs and multiple stories are an advantage because they provide minute by minute facts and are immediately online (Dedekind, 2019). For the national content team rewriting it for the newspapers, it is difficult because it is much information that needs to be processed (Dedekind, 2019). It can take up lots of time to blend blogs and multiple stories accurately (Dedekind, 2019). It is a great advantage

for Netwerk24 to be able to do blogs, for readers can follow when they cannot watch videos or television or listen to the radio (Dedekind, 2019).

Due to economic realities, the newsrooms have shrunk to skeleton staff (Van Staden, 2019). As far as Netwerk24 is concerned, there is a huge emphasis to report news as immediately as possible while it is still happening, and to be first in doing that (Van Staden, 2019). This means huge pressure on often very junior journalists to immediately create and publish stories whereas in the past there would have been more time to put in more effort to ensure a much better news story (Van Staden, 2019). One result is that the average journalist has become clustered to his desk and telephone, spending as little time as possible at news scenes (Van Staden, 2019). Furthermore, there is a huge focus on big news stories, since there simply is not enough staff to cover the smaller stories as well (Van Staden, 2019).

5.6 Summary

The workflow at the publications is not easy to condense to all-encompassing clear steps. This researcher argues that is because the teams are always interconnected, and roles are fluid – flowing between individuals. However, the following steps shows the general path along which most copy flow.

News ideas and news hints are directed to any of the three news editors who work in the north, central and south of South Africa. Some of the story ideas and requests for specific angles are sometimes given to the Netwerk24 news editors by senior staff at the newspapers.

Each of the three news editors have a morning news conference with their teams who they manage to get stories written with the desired angles. Thereafter, the news editors have a meeting with the senior staff at Netwerk24 about the day's news. Throughout the day these role players are in constant contact about new breaking stories or a change of plans on the articles pitched.

Journalists and desk reporters file the articles to a system to be edited by language professionals. Depending how fast the story must be published, the journalist, desk reporter or homepage editor has three options to send the article to be published. These are writing directly into the content management system, filing via any internet-based communication platform or thirdly manually into the company's Eidos system. All three paths lead past at least one sub editor to the homepage editor.

The articles are published by homepage editors. They decide where the articles are placed on the website, if a PN is sent out for the article, while they might change headlines or anything else, as they are the last eyes before publishing content.

A news conference is held in the afternoon between the national content team and the three printed newspapers' editors and assistant editors. During this meeting the newspapers give their requests for articles to the national content team, who in turn creates these articles for them.

All the content produced by Netwerk24 are kept in a central folder where relevant staff at the newspapers can access the content. There are four newspaper teams who can copy these articles to the three printed newspapers. The national content team examines all the import news articles for the day and write a wrap to be used in the newspapers.

All the content is re-edited for the newspapers changing the content to match the language style to the publication. The printed articles refer to times by "today, yesterday or tomorrow" while Netwerk24 always refers to Monday, Tuesday or Friday. This is different from rewriting content. In rewriting content, articles are changed to be more complete, better written and improved in any way possible.

An assistant editor decides which content is placed on which page. A layout artist fits the content to a page. Then a sub editor fits the copy to the available space after which another sub editor checks the copy again before each page is sent to the printer. A selection of news items relevant to the newspaper is also added to the landing page by a content editor to enlarge the newspapers branding online (see 4.4.1 and 5.4.1).

CHAPTER 6: Summary and conclusions

6.1 Summary

In chapter 1 of this study Netwerk24 and the three printed newspapers were introduced. The research goals were stated before continuing with the literature review in chapter 2. In chapter 2 other studies about newsrooms, revenue, the audience, online analytics and technologies were observed, and this academic literature was in part used to analyse the data in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 3 dealt with the theories concerning news routines, news selection, gatekeeping and news values which also influenced the research methodologies discussed in chapter 4, that deals with the methodology used in the data gathering and data analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the content analysis and interviews.

6.2 Conclusions

6.2.1 Research goal 1

Research goal 1 is to describe the flow of online news articles at Netwerk24 referring to the theories of gatekeeping and news values in the example of the Schweizer-event.

The photograph of the black children sitting separate from the white children in the classroom at the Schweizer-Reneke Primary School emerged on social media where Netwerk24 staff found the initial hint for the story.

A basic story was written to break the news online on 9 January 2019 at 17:40. This researcher argues the short article is written stating only little validated facts while waiting on comment from important role players. The publication was adhering to its gatekeeping role in this case by excluding many of the racial comments flowing freely on social media. The photograph had immense attention online as well as abroad. The story had little news value other than the curiosity of the public at first before the real facts were verified. The history of South Africa however does give some importance to the matter.

The next day a team consisting of a journalist, photographer and videographer traveled to the town from where they reported in-depth about the event. On the scene more facts strengthened the news value of the story.

6.2.2 Research goal 2

Research goal 2 is to describe the flow and selection process of articles about the Schweizer-event in *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*.

The first story was done after the midday conference between the newspapers and none of the articles published the first report on the article. From the interviews this researcher argues the newspapers were also adhering to their gatekeeping roles.

After the news value was higher, all facts available and all the sides of the story considered, the newspapers started publishing stories about the event.

6.2.3 Research question

These goals above was informed by the following general research question: What is the nature of the collaboration between Netwerk24 and the three daily newspapers in the context of the digital first strategy at Media24?

Netwerk24 and the three printed newspapers are collaborating in various ways, most prominently sharing news content produced by newsrooms.

Various teams exist within Netwerk24, including the homepage editors, the sub editors and journalists who are grouped in three newsrooms – who each also have satellite newsrooms. There are other teams for:

- social media which is integrated between Netwerk24, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*);
- graphics: this team produce all graphics for digital and print; and
- video and photographers, who also contribute to both platforms.

News articles are repurposed to all four publications from the same online newsrooms (2.3).

There is a definite difference in the workflow in the newsrooms at Netwerk24 and the news workers at the newspapers for planned and unplanned news events (see 3.2; 5.4.8).

The complete workflow (see 2.6) from where news hints or story ideas can enter the flow of news in many ways, including through the news editors, journalists, newspaper senior staff, the homepage editors as well as through bloggers keeping a wide view of big news is described (see 5.6).

The idea that surfaced in the literature that legacy printed media will fund digital ventures is correct in the case of Netwerk24 and the printed newspapers. Collaboration is thus on a financial level as well (2.4; 5.4.2).

6.3 Opportunities for further research

Research on the audiences of both the newspapers and the online publications might reveal interesting results regarding which factors play a role in the eyes of the audience, as to the quality of an article.

Furthermore, the data collected during the interviews indeed identified the importance of the user experience and wayfinding within the context of journalism, with relevant future research thus required.

Finally, although only a few readers within the Netwerk24 environment is using smart watch technology in 2019, the anticipated growth in this regard within the international trend (5.5.2) will undoubtedly necessitate future research.

This researcher also suggests a study to investigate if the quality of current news articles on Netwerk24 are lacking in quality in comparison to articles written 10 years ago.

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Loubser, H. 2019b. Personal telephone interview conducted on 20 September 2019. Recording available from the author.

Smith, C. 2019. Personal interview conducted on 1 October 2019. Recording available from the author.

Van Staden, C. 2019. Personal email interview conducted on 27 September 2019. Copy of email available from the author.

Appendix A:

Interview questions

1. Describe your role at the publication.
2. How long have you been working in this environment and in this role?
3. Were you involved in the writing or in the production of articles about the alleged racism event at Schweizer-Reneke Primary School in January 2019? If yes, how?
4. Describe the digital first process.
5. What is the role of desk reporters?
6. Describe what you do with articles or news stories?
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the digital first process for Netwerk24?
8. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the digital first process for the newspapers?
9. How do you balance stories receiving many clicks (clickbait) versus traditional news values?
10. Which technologies and social media is used in the workflow and operations of the publications, including but not limited to news gathering? How are they used?
11. Why are the printed articles different from the online articles?
12. Who changes the articles?
13. How are they changed? Why?
14. Are all articles changed? Why?
15. Is the final copy influenced by economy, strikes or cost of production?
16. Did the role of journalists and the news media change in recent decades? Does this impact the news routines and published content of Netwerk24, *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*?
17. What do you think of the idea of gate checkers instead of gatekeepers? Traditionally gatekeepers used to have absolute control over most information. Some studies suggest the news industry cannot control information anymore, but only check some information.
18. Do you refer to teams in your organisation and/or function as teams in your opinion?
19. How does the repurposing of content affect the print and online publications?
20. Are printed newspapers funding Netwerk24?
21. Do regulators, as in the owners/Naspers/shareholders influence the published content?
22. Referring to the alleged racism event at Schweizer-Reneke Primary School in January 2019: Why did *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* only start to publish about the event on the Friday, but Netwerk24 published the first article on Wednesday 9 January 17:20. Please list possible reason you think apply.

23. Why are some articles published first online before print uses it the next day, and others appear on the same day?
24. Do journalists only write stories in the area they are based?
25. Blogs or multiple stories are published online, and a wrap thereof in print. What are the advantages for online and for print?
26. With blogs – who gets the byline? How are the roles of journalists changing in this environment?
27. Do you approach planned and unplanned articles as well as blogs differently?

Appendix B:**Netwerk24**

Wednesday, 9 January	17:20	Rasseherrie oor swart en wit kinders apart in klas
Thursday, 10 January	10:07	Chaos op Schweizer, breek heining om kinders te red
Thursday, 10 January	11:10	OORSIG: Schweizer – Unie kry regsadvies vir onderwyseres
Thursday, 10 January	15:36	Schweizer-pa: Ek moet my 5-jarige nou leer van ons geskiedenis
Thursday, 10 January	18:24	Schweizer: Kinders op grond van taal geskei – skool
Thursday, 10 January	18:59	Moenie oordeel nie, waarsku AfriForum
Thursday, 10 January	21:42	Schweizer-Reneke: ‘Kinders verstaan nie’
Friday, 11 January	13:38	EKSKLUSIEF: Geskorste juffrou: Dit was nie haar klas nie
Friday, 11 January	16:21	Nog ‘n juffrou van Schweizer dalk geskors
Saturday, 12 January	19:02	Schweizer-onnie ‘mag nooit weer skoolhou’, sê EFF
Sunday, 13 January	00:00	‘Sy is ‘n goeie juffrou. . .’
Sunday, 13 January	00:17	LUR skors onnie ‘asof dit sy skool is’
Monday, 14 January	06:15	Voorsorg getref om Schweizer-skool veilig te hou
Monday, 14 January	08:27	Situasie vreedsaam in Schweizer voor ondersoek
Monday, 14 January	13:07	Schweizer: Gemoedere loop hoog agter die skerms
Monday, 14 January	17:38	‘Skool nie rassisties,’ sê swart ma
Monday, 14 January	19:16	Solidariteit, geskorste onnie praat Dinsdag oor planne
Tuesday, 15 January	11:55	OORSIG: Juffrou is ‘geslagte lam op altaar’
Tuesday, 15 January	13:22	Lees Schweizer-juffrou se verklaring hier

Tuesday, 15 January	14:39	KYK: Schweizer-juffrou praat: ‘My naam is geskop en verder geskop’
Tuesday, 15 January	17:12	Schweizer: ‘My lewe is verwoes’ – juffrou
Tuesday, 15 January	18:31	‘Dis nie ons nie,’ sê departement oor skorsing
Wednesday, 16 January	11:04	OORSIG: Nóg personeel by Schweizer-skool gaan geskors word
Wednesday, 16 January	13:40	Solidariteit ‘moet opsy staan’ sê Lesufi
Wednesday, 16 January	17:16	Schweizer: LUR sê oor nóg skorsings by skool
Thursday, 17 January	09:34	Schweizer: Departement roep halt
Thursday, 17 January	12:51	Schweizer: Ouer wat kla kon glo nie afslag kry
Thursday, 17 January	13:52	KYK: Só lyk geskorste Schweizer-juffrou se klas eintlik
Thursday, 17 January	16:49	LEES SELF: Hier is Schweizer-hofstukke

Beeld

Friday, 11 January	1	‘Kinders verstaan nie’
Friday, 11 January	4	Foto lei tot chaos
Saturday, 12 January	8	Nog ‘n juffrou dalk geskors in Schweizer
Monday, 14 January	1	Voorsorg getref om Schweizer-Reneke skool veilig te hou
Tuesday, 15 January	5	Skool is g’n rassisties, sê swart ma
Wednesday, 16 January	11	Twee blikke op Schweizer
Wednesday, 16 January	1	‘Ek gaan baklei’
Thursday, 17 January	10	Nóg personeel dalk geskors
Friday, 18 January	7	Foto’s vertel ander storie

Die Burger

Friday, 11 January	1	‘Kinders weet nie waaroor dit gaan’	
Friday, 11&12 January	1	‘Kleuters weet nie waaroor dit gaan’	OOS-KAAP

Tuesday, 15 January	4	‘Swart, wit kinders nie apart gehou’	
Tuesday, 15 January	4	‘Swart, wit kinders nie apart gehou’	OOS-KAAP
Wednesday, 16 January	1	‘Ek sal aanhou veg’	
Wednesday, 16 January	1	‘Ek sal aanhou veg’	OOS-KAAP
Thursday, 17 January	5	LUR sê oor nóg skorsings	
Thursday, 17 January	5	LUR sê oor nóg skorsings	OOS-KAAP
Friday, 18 January	1	Ras-foto: Skorsings in spore gestuit	
Friday, 18 January	1		

Volksblad

Friday, 11 January	1	‘Kinders verstaan nie’
Saturday, 12 January	5	Juffrou ‘wou kinders net help’
Tuesday, 15 January	10	Skool is nie rassisties, sê swart ma
Wednesday, 16 January	1	‘Ek gaan bakei’
Thursday, 17 January	1	Nóg glo geskors
Friday, 18 January	1	Skorsings in spore gestuit